

Becoming the Enemy

by Endeavorer

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Adventure, Friendship

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup, Toothless

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-09-18 06:27:07

Updated: 2014-11-10 17:28:21

Packaged: 2016-04-26 16:06:48

Rating: T

Chapters: 25

Words: 284,867

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Hiccup has received a strange book full of knowledge about dragons. Finding a potion that grants strength and the designs for a special arrow, he sets out to slay the Night Fury. Except now he finds himself slowly losing his humanity bit by bit... while simultaneously changing the Night Fury into just an ordinary boy. And then things got even stranger.

1. Chapter 1

****Disclaimer:** Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ******

****Inspired by:** "I Hear Him Scream" by Rift-Raft and "Lightning and Death Itself" by Chelst******

****This fic uses the stage of the first movie, but a drastically different storyline. There's also dozens of book and TV series elements that are being incorporated into the story's setting. Including characters and mythology gags. They are not important to understanding the story, but help.****

****In case the summary failed communicate the stated intentions of the fic, this is a transformation centric story, though no actual transformations occur for first few chapters. There is going to be plenty of transformation in this story with more happening later on. The most notable and obvious one is the sort of species reversal of Toothless and Hiccup will experience.****

****Update Nov 10:** There has to be some sort of record. I've essentially changed the Summary like 6 times by now, because I could not decide what conveyed information the best.******

****This story contains plenty of different genres in it... The themes of family and friendship are a long standing part of this story. The story goes places. Angst is involved... alot, but should be bearable.**

There's also physical pain and suffering joined by body horror due to the unique transformation method, you'll see later on.**

I hope you all enjoy the following chapter and please remember to submit constructive criticism and ask questions.

* * *

><p>"Trader Johann is here early!" I heard one of the dock workers say. Unlike other Vikings, this man had a bucket instead of a more traditional helmet. "Trader Johann!" he cried again before he capsized his own boat in excitement. His name was Bucket. It paid to know the names of your customers. The man a wide variety of talents from what I heard, artist and predicting weather among other things.<p>

Berk was always one of my favorite stopping points. Full of a wide variety of customers willing to barter and wealthy enough to potentially take my whole stock if the need arose, there was a profit to be made in here. Unfortunately, that only applied to the best of days. A whiff and a glance of the harbor told me that a battle had happened recently, probably this morning. It would certainly explain the flock I encountered on my way.

From experience, I knew it meant three things for my little mobile store: First, it meant that people were more willing to deal with me as I probably had valuable supplies that might have been destroyed by recent events. Second, it meant that people had less to trade with. More than once, had I come to a battlescared island only to find the village had every intention of trading with me, only to not have anything to offer in return. That led to the third thing, the village might be more willing to simply take those valuables from me. Which is why I was wary as I moved my ship to dock. Though, admittedly, the cries of relief and excitement I received did make it seem like that last possibility was unlikely.

My ship stopped at one of the still functioning piers. And with as much strength as I could muster, I heaved the boarding plank onto the dock. I was getting too old for this, maybe I need to get an assistant. "Ah , Berk! My Favorite of all the islands I travel to!" I said in my most excited tone.

Bucket who had in the time I spent mooring my craft climbed up to the pier. "Where have you been this time, Trader Johann?" I could see others either rushing to my ship or to their own homes. For me, that was a good sign. And with any luck, they would tell their chieftain for me.

"Oh, Bucket!" I said as I invited the one handed man on board. "The things I have seen, the people I have met, I'd need a swig to regale you!" I turned my back to him and turned to the gathering crowd. "And fortunately, today, I have plenty of time to do that." I stepped up on a chest, which I had filled a variety of things. "All-Day today, whatever it is you're looking for, I can assure you you'll find it here!" Everyone on the docks immediately began boarding. In fact there were so many of them that they had to start a line to get on my ship. "I've got food of all sorts, spices, exotic animals, works of art, jewelry, not to mention knowledge!" I loved showman ship; not only was it fun, but it certainly made people even more receptive when trading with me.

Under normal circumstances, I would not be spending a whole day moored to a single port. Usually, I would spend at most an hour then sail off to distant lands. This was not a normal circumstance: catching a village that was both a recent victim of a dragon attack and still possessed enough goods to trade with me was not an opportunity I would want to pass up. Oh and I had a package to deliver to Stoic and I expect him to be very late to meet me. Best not to bother a man who has to manage rebuilding a village.

After one hour, it was clear that the highest selling products would be anything edible. Obviously due to the large amount of livestock taken, granaries demolished, and crops burned; dragon raids always made the price of food go up. But since I was feeling nice, I decided not to raise my prices past their normal values. Before I knew what had happened, I was starting to run low on food. "I am sorry, Berk, but it seems that I must discontinue the sale food stuffs for the rest of the day," I had to say to them. "Any more and I might have to start eating my own clothes. But don't worry, next time, I'll see about bringing a boat load!" They laughed at that, but that announcement did not stop a large chunk of my potential customers from leaving the line before getting on my store.

Soon the line thinned out before disappearing all together, leaving me with the two most awkward Vikings in Berk. Fishlegs Ingerman and Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third were the only two I know on Berk who were interested in my more unusual materials. Books, writing supplies, and other forms of knowledge and knowledge related things were not exactly the most popular thing for Vikings, but there was always someone on every island who reveled in the stuff. The two of them took their time, knowing full well the things they were interested in were rarely fought over. They were making idle chatter over what they should or should not buy.

Fishlegs came over to me. "Trader Johann, you wouldn't happen to have any botany books would you?" he said.

"Fresh out of those, I am afraid, Mister Fishlegs." I replied. "But I can easily fix that. Would you want me to put you down for a special order?" I pulled out a note pad and a pen.

Fishlegs nodded. "That'd be great. Would you want me to pay you right now?" We both filled out the note pad with the order details and before long only Hiccup and I remained on my ship. No one else seemed to be interested in my stock and Stoic the Vast still had not arrived.

I turned my attention to Hiccup, the chief's son. "Anything catch you eye, Hiccup?"

"No, not really." I heard the teenager say. I could tell when people were feeling down and boy did he have it. As a trader, my job was to know the needs people have and provide a solution. Give people the right item and they will trade you a different item that was not worth as much to them, but might be worth more to someone else. That was how we made profits. It was slower and more tedious than simply exchanging coins, but so long as I had enough to feed myself and I had a stable job, I couldn't complain. I knew enough about him from his father and personal experience to know what was causing his depression. Unfortunately Hiccup's problem, was not something that a

simple item could fix. I could offer him relief, but I could not offer him anything approaching to a true solution. "Unless you, I don't know, had a Night Fury stanced somewhere around here I could kill."

"Night Fury?" I asked for confirmation. "The Dragon Raid this morning I take it?"

"Yeah." He said, as he raised his right hand to pretend he was pinching an invisible grape. "I was this close to killing it!"

I sat down on one of my treasure chests around the ship. "Would you like to talk about it?" I offered, dropping my normally exciting tone.

"I'm sorry. It's just been frustratingâ€¦" He inhaled deeply. "Early this morning, we had a raid, I snuck outâ€¦ again. I found the Night Fury attacking one of the towers and before I could shoot it down, I get attacked by a Monstrous Nightmare. In my panic, I tried to shoot it, but my bola launcher had a misfireâ€¦"

"Bola launcher?" I asked.

"Yeah, I made itâ€¦ Since I couldn't, you know, throw it myself, I made something throw it for me. Based it off those crossbow diagrams I got from you last time." That was interesting. For someone so young, Hiccup had managed to translate the designs of a weapon and redesign them for a completely different use. "It got crushed by the Nightmare, but not before it entangled some unfortunate Viking." He gave a strained laugh, which I could tell was an attempt to make the event seem less painful than it really was. "Well dad saved meâ€¦ and the guy did live. Apparently he, well, actually she, now has a date, too. So I guess that means, I can't even have a proper misfire."

"There's always next time. Never know you might get lucky."

"Yeah, I know...I just wish, I wasn'tâ€¦" He gestured to himself. "This."

"You just gestured to all of youâ€¦"

"Trade Johann, I just want to be able to take down one dragon," he said. "Just one, and my life will be so much better. Can you offer me something to me do that, please?"

This was not the first time that Hiccup had asked me to give him tools he could use to defeat dragons. Ever since the boy turned ten, he wanted as much knowledge he could, especially knowledge relating to dragons and weapons. And at this time, I had exhausted everything in my trade route that could conceivably aid himâ€¦ wellâ€¦ almost everything. "Wait, right here," I said as I opened a hatch to go below deck. "I might have something."

While I had the top of my ship devoted entirely to be the store, below deck was both my living quarters and extra storage. Behind the stairs I used to get down, I had a chest. A very special chest as it stored all of the items I deemed would be impossible to sell to anyone. Included in it was a fake chicken made entirely out of a strange substance that made it a rather limp statue, a hallow ball

that when filled with water and heated by fire released steam and spun around, a case containing a powder that produced sparks when lit on fire and the description of how to make it, and book covered in black dragon scales.

If it were a normal book, I might have sold it off years ago, but it was not a normal book. For starters it was written in three separate languages, sometimes switching between them in the same page. This alone made it incredibly difficult and time consuming to read. The other factor that made the book an incredibly difficult to sell item was the fact that anytime I found someone who would have been able to understand it, circumstances have forced me to abandon the trade. I once had a guy nearly drown, in a desert no less, before I could have given him the book. Even tried to get rid of it once, only for a fisherman a different island to return to me as an item to barter for trade. I could swear that it was cursed, so I tried not to look into it. About the only thing I was sure of was that the book dealt with dragons based on the pictures I saw in it before I deemed it too dangerous for me to read.

I did not want to be responsible for the son of Stoic the Vast's death, but somehow, I felt that I should give at least _try_ to give it to the lad. I sighed, making a decision. Hiccup did not need to know the almost supernatural nature of that book. If the boy by some decree of the Norns or the Fates or whoever else manipulated Destinies, was not affected by the strange curse bestowed on that volume. Then, that was that. I would be done dealing with such an accursed object being on my ship.

I took the tome and climbed back upstairs. "This Hiccup," I said in an excited tone, "is a very special book. It is the last thing I have to offer you to be a dragon slayer." I showed him the black scaled book, expecting Thor to strike the boy dead or Poseidon to take the whole ship. The boy took the book and began looking at its contents at an alarming rate. No freak accidents or bad luck happened. I was somewhat surprised, I had expected something to happen.

"This isâ€¦ interestingâ€¦" Hiccup said. "It's got some Norse in itâ€¦ and uh a lot ofâ€¦ other words I can't read."

"Yes, Norse, Latin, and one other language I did not recognize," I said.

"Where did you get it?"

"It was given to me by an old manâ€¦ gave him some clothes and he gave me this in return, but I could never find someone willing or able to buy it before."

"Why not?" Hiccup said as he showed me a page in the book. In it there was a dragon, a Monstrous Nightmare, a vicious and powerful beast, recoiling in fearâ€¦ from a black and yellow striped eel. That puzzled me, why was one of the most terrifying and deadly of all dragonkind so deathly afraid of an eel. "There's a ton of dragon slaying stuff in this book. It says here that most dragons are terribly afraid of some types of eel. I gotta' see if that trick works." Note to self, buy striped eels and test that. Would be handy next time I had to go through that flock of Terrors by that one island. They always seemed to know just where I would show up and sneak onto the ship without my knowing.

"So I take it you'd like to have it?" I said lazily.

"Yes, I do. Well, what you want for it?" Hiccup said. "I don't think you want another spyglass for something so valuable!"

"Yeah, I have five, and I only got the two eyes," I joked. "Tell you what, if you find anything else worthwhile in the book, tell me about it next time. And see if you can get your father here, I have been waiting forever for him. I have something I need to deliver to him." Just the fact that book would never plague me again was all the payment I needed. That plus, giving the son of a chief a present could have several positive effects in my future dealings with him later.

"Thank you, Trader Johann." Hiccup said a bit more jubilant than before. He flipped through the pages of his new possession, looking for anything of interest to him. And suddenly, without any warning, he burst out in a sprint. "Yes, yes! This is absolutely perfect," I heard him say. Apparently he found something that was really exciting.

I saw a big grin form on his face. And then he was off, leaving me alone. It seemed, that boy can run fast with the right motivation. I complimented myself on a job well done. Though I did not really gain anything physical from the trade, I knew I gained something that was equally important. I just hoped it would not kill the boy.

Now came the reason I was really here.

* * *

><p>The Great Hall was empty, save for myself. My best friend, Gobber, and my brother, Spitelout, had left.<p>

I needed to think about what I needed to do next.

My son and Dragon Training did not make sense. I respect Gobber's opinions on the matter, but there was no telling the kind of damage that boy would cause. I felt sorry for what group that the one handed blacksmith would stick the boy in. As was tradition, we would divide all applicants for Dragon Training into groups of up to eight trainees, with the intention to ensure each group had an average level of skill and to form a cohesive bond as a fighting unit. This year, there was probably fifty going through Dragon Training. This unfortunately meant that, Hiccup, being the worst Viking, will without a doubt be put in the same group as that Hofferson girl and Snotlout, two of the best our generation had to offer. Everyone else in the group would be at best average combatants.

Sometimes, I wonder if my son was destined to be a Viking. He could barely lift a sword, let alone fight with one. He was clumsy and destructive. His every action outside of supervision had disastrous consequences. And I knew just how badly my son wanted to change that. That was why he was obsessed with the Night Fury. That creature strategically tore down the defenses of any settlement it hit. It had cunning and power to match it, and no one had ever seen it. It was the ultimate prize, the goal of any Viking to find and kill that beast. Any Viking, even one as bad as Hiccup, would become an instant hero the moment they slew it. After that, no one would doubt him ever

again. No one _could _doubt him again.

In a way, I admired his zeal and determination. I just wish that innocent people were not caught in the crossfire. Things weren't so bad that I had to consider disowning him. And he wasn't a total screw up, justâ€¦ only most of the time. Life was hard on both of us, especially since Val left us when Hiccup was barely just a babe. Hopefully, she was speaking to Odin about ways to help us. Who knows, maybe my son will turn out to be the greatest Viking ever and he was just going through an awkward childhood phase. _A man can dream for his little boy to have a growth spurt can't he?_

And not every hiccup he had ended in total disaster. After all, none of us, except for the parents, knew his victim today was a womanâ€¦ Between a name like Magnus and his, er, her appearance at the time, none of us could have actually seen the difference. Now, she was considering renaming herself to Hildegard and having wedding arrangements.

I sighed. I needed to see Hiccup and tell him my plans. Which as coincidence would have it, my son came inside the Great Hall for me. He appeared to be short of breath and covered with sweat. That worried me, because I knew that meant he had another one of his hair brained schemes cooking up in his head. "Dad, I've been waiting for you. Trader Johann came by an hour ago. He said he wanted to meet you on the docks." That relieved me as it meant my son wasn't going to be something incredibly reckless and foolish.

"Oh, so what business he have for me?" I chuckled. It was fortunate for us that aid had come for us. Though why was he so early? The was supposed to come by our island near every quarter, not two weeks after his last visit.

"He just said he had something for you, didn't tell me what."

"Alright, I'll meet up with Johann, but after that, we need to have a talk."

I saw my son's face form into a frown. "Dad, if it's about today, I'll tryâ€¦ to makeâ€¦ fix thingsâ€¦"

"No, son," I said solemnly, "It's about your future. Don't worry, son, I know you have what it takes to to be a proper Viking, you just have toâ€¦"

"Stop being all of this," he gestured to himself. "I get it dad." I saw him try to force a small smile. Both of us parted ways.

I went to the docks and found Johann there, idly singing a tune. "Ah Stoic, you're finally here. Welcome to my store." He gave a polite bow and motioned his arms with a dramatic flair as he gestured for me to come aboard.

"I see you've done business without informing me you had arrived," I said, in a nonthreatening tone. I liked Johann, he was a good friend, a trust worthy ally, and a fantastic sailor. After all, no normal man braves the Barbaric Archipelago, in a ship stuffed to the brim with valuable cargo and proceeded to do that constantly, year after year. But as good as he was, I needed to make sure that he respected the

rules of the island as its chieftain. "And you are still here despite not having any customers. You usually pack up and leave when that happens."

"I humbly apologize if my conduct has insulted you, but I needed to give us some private time. That is hard to do with a ship loaded with customersâ€¦" The merchant shook his head. "And no offense to you, Stoic, but I do not trust leaving my ship unattended in anyone's harbor."

"Your reasoning fair, and for that, I shall forgive you. Though next time, I expect you send someone to inform me. Now, my son has informed me you have something for me. I assume this matter is important." The docks were mostly empty at this time, most of the men who were normally worked there were out fishing at this time and none of them seemed to have enough free time to listen in our conversation.

"Yes, very." The trader brew a bottle and a pair of mugs from one of his chests. He tossed me one of the mugs, which I caught. By the All-Father, whatever this was it was important enough to take out drinks, strong drinks. The merchant deftly uncorked the bottle and pour the beverage down our glass. It liquid fizzed and bubbled, almost spilling out of our cups. "In the past few weeks, us traders have received reports of increased dragon activity. Far more than in years prior. Also, we can confirm two attacks happening on the same date at the same time, and sightings by witnesses claim that both raids featured a Night Fury."

I just stood there my mouth agape. "Who were hit? And how bad was it?"

"Both the Meatheads and Bog Burglars were hit hard, with the same result you face today. We would have expected a second raid today, if it were not for the heavy casualties that the Meatheads inflicted upon their attackers this season."

I drank my glass. When there was only one, it had been trouble enough as the monster took down towers and siege weapons, leaving the Viking vulnerable and forcing them to spend valuable time and resources building replacements. Night Furies were not part of every raid against every village, but they were a key component of any raid that went against the largest or most heavily defended settlements. "Loki must be laughing his pants off right now."

"And that's not all. In light of this news, the Oswald the Agreeable wants to set a trap for them." I saw the trader take a sip.

"Currently, their village is the only one of the Great Tribes left untouched by this season of raids. So now he's declaring a 'Thing' on his lands to get as many warriors as he can. Or at the very least, develop strategies and share information. He thinks that allowing the dragons to have this much of an advantage could prove fatal to us in the long run and wants to cull their numbers to a more manageable level. So, I was sent."

"But that's not the purpose of an Inter-Tribal Council Meeting!" I said loudly. Oswald the Agreeable was the Chief of the Berserker Tribe, self-proclaimed to be the most violent and blood thirsty in the whole of the Barbaric Archipelago. To people who did not know him as I did, the title of "the Agreeable", sounded out of place for such

a vicious and blood thirsty tribe. It makes much more sense when you know about _what_ it actually _means._ He was a great leader who usually listened to the counsel of others before making important decisions. He respected everyone's opinion, including the ones of those who disagreed with him. However, if you ever _disagreed_ with him, you had to be prepared to defend it, both _physically_ and _mentally_.

"So thenâ€¦ what is the purpose of the Thing? I thought you Cheifs all did planned violent things at those meetings."

"That we do, but mostly, the meetings are there to reconfirm Alliances, proclaim deeds made, and signing treatiesâ€¦ among other things. It's just that it normally is not used to form a war council _and_ _form a warband_ _before_ the Thing is called." And because it meant I had to abandon my plans of searching for the dragon nest in order to attend. And because, by law of the chiefs, Hiccup and Snotlout had to attend alongside me. This meant a serious change in my original plansâ€¦ which also meant I needed to reconvene the Hooligan Tribe in the Great Hall for another meeting, less than a few hours from the last. I drank from my mug again, thanking Johann for his foresight. "What are the terms of the invitation?"

The merchant pulled out a small envelope, which was kept closed by the wax seal of the Berserker tribe. I broke the seal and read the letter.

In light of recent events, it has come to my attention that we need to gather our military resources together. The dragons have become more daring. Their numbers have grown more numerous as of late, potentially allowing them to form attacks with both greater frequency and with more ferocity than ever before. If the normal movement and patterns are the same as they usually are, then I expect my Tribe to be the last of the Great Tribes to suffer an attack from the enemy. Therefore, I propose to you all to give up your yearly searches for the Dragon Nest and instead deal with the immediate matter of the Dragon Hordes.

For this purpose, I invite you all to my home, Fort Sinister. On my honor, I shall grant you shelter, protection, and food under the Code of Hospitality for up to the maximum duration of two weeks after the arrival of the latest chief or to three days after the Dragon Raid has been routed, whichever is more appropriate. In exchange, I offer food and wealth proportional to the number of dragons slain, accounting for differences in size and power for each breed, divided evenly between the Tribes who participate and an additional sum, specific to each tribe, proportionate to the forces brought, with respect to fallen warriors and destroyed warships.

_We must cull their numbers before they grow too powerful,
>Oswald, the Agreeable
>Great High Chieftain of the Berserker Tribe._

"As you can see," Trader Johann said to me as he finished his drink. "He's very serious."

I nodded. Now I had no choice but to accept his invitation. While I had wanted to take the fight directly to the dragon's home and permanently end the war, it was far more important to me that I ensured the future of the Hooligan Tribe. Our food stores were

pillaged and destroyed and I knew this winter would be hard on all of us. And I knew that the Berserkers were a tribe that was seemingly blessed by Freya to always have bountiful crops, allowing them to be one of the largest harvests in the Archipelago. Even with all of those things, I knew that Oswald would be hard pressed to fully pay every tribe who attended thisâ€¦ Thing, blessing by a fertility goddess or not. He was desperate. But, my tribe needed every advantage it could get. We needed the payment Oswald was offering, even if in a small part. I finished my drink and handed the empty mug to Trader Johann. "Will you be coming with us?"

"No, I've deviated from my scheduled route too much already. I have to get back to it now." I nodded and left the Trader alone.

* * *

><p>Even after parting with dad, I still couldn't help but be excited. How could I not when I had the chance to fix everything? I could finally be the Viking my father always wanted, and it was all right in the bag I carried under my shoulder.<p>

I've always been ridiculed by how strange and un-Viking like I was. I am scrawny for a Viking, barely able to lift all but the lightest of weapons; I should have been like my father who when he was my age broke rocks with his skull. I am I am a walking disaster waiting to happen, it seemed my every action left someone on Berk in the infirmary; I should have been able to live up to my preferred title: "Hope and Heir to the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans". And today, I will be as I should have been.

I had only needed to skim through the book Trader Johann had given me before I had an idea of how it was organized. Inside the book, there were a variety of articles. Each article took up about two pages even, with no deviations and each article was set up so that both pages could be read at the same time. Typically, the left page contained an exposition describing the benefits and the right page contained the instructions. The problem was the languages used. Trade Johann had been right about that the book have used 3 separate languages, sometimes all of them in the same page. There was no pattern I could discern and it all seemed to be completely random. I could easily tell that a solid fourth of the articles were Norse enough for me to use. Unfortunately for me, I only knew Norse. Which made me slightly regret that dad had opted not to send me to Rome when I was little, well, littler so I could have learned Latin. And I had no clue what the third language was.

Based on the fact there were tiny boxes of text scattered, again at random, throughout the whole of the book, my best guess was that it was notebook of some sort. Probably written from the notes of multiple people who all spoke different languages, and it was haphazardly assembled into a single dragon scaled tome. The only thing I was fairly sure of was that the book, with one out of place exception, spoke about nothing but dragons and dragon related subjects. It was like the Book of Dragons, but covered the parts which were not in that book. Such as that striped eels cause a sort of panic reflex in dragons and that a certain type of tall grass can be used to knock out dragons. Everything in itâ€¦ so many dragon related facts and I got it for practically nothing. Once I figured out this book enough, I decided I would show it to Fishlegs first, to help me understand it better. He would be estaticâ€¦ Then I would

probably show it to Father.

Of course, that was not the most important thing to me right now. That one seeming exception to dragon related subjects I found, was the recipe to a some sort of potion. According to the parts I could read, the potion "enhanced physical performance: heightened coordination and boosted physical strength". Its name and a large chunk of its description were in some other language than Norse, but thankfully, I could see that everything on the recipe was in the language I could read. For a moment I thought it was strange that a book that offered nothing but dragon related information would offer such a thing. Of course, then I read that the description featured mostly dragon related materials in its recipe. Such as, shavings from a Gronckle's horns, a Deadly Nadder spike, and blood from a Monstrous Nightmare. The ingredients and their preparation wereâ€¦ unusual. I mean what kind of normal use of chemistry requires you to inscribe a pot with chalk before using it? This told me whatever I was about to do wasn't a purely physical use of chemistry the same way metalworking was. It wasâ€¦ magic, sorcery. But if it got my dad to respect me more, I think I could live with it.

Gathering the ingredients, except for the last one, was uneventful. I only needed to go pick some random plants, loot remains from the slain dragons, or get salt. In fact, the only thing that was difficult for me to get was the last ingredient, a berry from a deadly nightshade. And I only know of two people in the whole of Berk who had berries from that plant. Unfortunately, they were the twins. I walked up to the porch of Ruff and Tuff's house and knocked the door. "Well, would you look who the cat dragged in?" Ruffnut said.

"I know, he does look like some sort of hair ball!" her brother said.

"Uhâ€¦ Hi!" I said, trying ignore the statement. "I need a favorâ€¦"

"No," the brother said, "we're not helping you do something incredibly stupid and dangerous."

"Unless we get front seats," said Ruff, which got her a thumbs up from her brother.

"Tell us what you need, but make it good."

I did not want the twins involved in what I was about to do. Not the least because several of the ingredients my potion needed were extremely poisonous. That and because they had a track record of being bad at keeping secrets. "Uh. I would like one of those deadly nightshade berries you keep." I knew they had them, they liked to brag about it.

"Oh, are you going to poison someone?" Ruff.

"Or are you going to eat it? " Tuff.

"Cook it then eat itâ€¦" I said dryly.

"Yeah, we should definitely watch that." Tuff.

"Nothing quite like a good suicide." Ruff. This conversation brought up many uncomfortable questions that I sincerely believed I did not want to have answered. At that point both of them slammed their heads together.

"Hey, look, I'm sure you both have got very busy schedules." I said to them. "You should probably groom your yak or polish your axe or use your axe to polish your yak."

"That's a great idea," Ruff.

"But we still want to watch you kill yourself." Tuff.

"Look, I kinda want to do this without anyone watching, you understand?"

The twins looked insulted so they turned their backs to me and began discussing something. "Fine," the brother said. "But we want something for our services."

"We want what's left of your bolas launcher," the sister said.

"Yeah, so we can finally make it clear to everyone that Ruffnut is a girl." At that point the brother received a boot to the foot. "Ow! Ow!" he said as he leapt up and down while holding his damaged foot in the air.

I nodded in agreement and returned a few minutes later returned to the house with a wheelbarrow full of the discarded parts and pieces of my machine that died in the line of duty this morning. "Pleasure doing business with you. Ow!" said the twins at the same time as they had apparently engaged in a slugfest the moment I left.

They only broke their fighting long enough to point their fingers at a jar, which contained a single swollen black berry swimming in a green liquid. Trust the twins to pickle an extremely poisonous berries and place one of them in a jar. _Best not to think about why they have them in the first place too much, Hiccup._ I left the twins and went back home.

The Chieftain's home was one of the longest standing structures in all of Berk, one of only a handful of buildings that had been around for more than a decade. People said that my father used his tremendous strength to build the home for his bride to be with his bare hands. Did I believe them? Yes. And I knew for a fact that this same strength had been used to fend off dozens dragon attacks. It had been hard to believe growing up. I wanted so much when I was kid to be strong like that, yet as I grew older, I learned I could never do the things he did. _And tonight that's going to change._

Father had apparently not returned home yet, which was fine by me. It gave me as much time as I needed to do what I needed to do. I lit the fire place. Before, I did anything else, I sat down and prayed to Odin, the All-Father. While it was true he was a powerful warrior, I also knew he was a great magician and wielded vast power. And whatever it was I was attempting to do, I believed it fell under his domain. And I needed all the help I could muster. "Please, please, just this once, help me, All-Father. Let me be stronger, just a little. I'll take even average strength if you want," I prayed. I

continued this for a few minutes until I decided the god had enough from me.

Then I began the potion. I took one of the older cooking pots in the house, one of the ones we did not use any more due to its age, and wrote chalk inscriptions in it that were described in another entry in the book. I did not want to accidentally poison my father so I needed a pot that he was unlikely to use again. I prepared the ingredients as the book described. The only trouble I had was with trying to shred the Gronckle horns. I used a metal file to slowly grind the Gronckle horn away. Unsurprisingly the file broke by the time I had collected enough dust from it. I threw the remains of the file away.

I placed the contents of the pot on the fireplace and waited patiently. I could hear the liquid simmering and bubbling inside the pot. The sound grew louder and louder until it the pot started to violently shake. I grabbed the pot and poured its contents into a mug. I was not expecting the resulting liquid to be soâ€¦ viscous. For starters, it had an orange glow and poured slowly like molasses out of the pot. It resembled molten metal more than something I should drink. And for a moment I thought it was, if it weren't for the surprisingly sweet smell and the steam.

I took the cup and raised it to my lips. Unfortunately, this was going to be the most uncomfortable part in all of this. And that was when I realized the catch. If I failed to properly prepare the drink, dad would come home to find himself without a sonâ€¦ I tried to keep my mind off of the possibility that he would have been better off if I failed. I drank it all. My insides burned. Everything went dark.

Then I feltâ€¦ a pressure against my shoulder. I awoke slowly, my head felt like something was running around through it and my vision was blurry. I could make out something red. I blinked a few times, clearing the weariness from my sight. Each time, I saw my father a bit clearer than last. "D-daad-d?" I said wearily.

"I need to speak with you, son."

I lifted my head up and tried to rub the sleep from my eyes. I felt so tired. Other than the fact my head felt like it had been hit by Snotlout and that my stomach felt like I had bricks for dinner, I didn't feel any different. "Yeah?" I said with a groan. "Go aheadâ€¦"

"Are you alright?" My dad showed some concern and placed his absolutely huge hands on his forehead. "You don't feel like you have a fever."

"Oh, that's just lunchâ€¦ Really bad lunch." I sorta lied, but sorta not. "Now what were you saying?"

"You get your wish," my dad said. "Dragon Training, I will be your teacher." That surprised me. Wasn't Gobber supposed to teach dragon training class? And wasn't dad supposed to go off searching for the Dragon Nest again? Maybe it had something to do with what Trade Johann had me get my father for.

"Uh, what?" I said, becoming more coherent with every breath.

Dad ignored me and gave me a heavy axe. "You'll need this."

"But dad, how are you going to train me when you're off sailing?" I said as I stood up.

"Change of plans, you'll be coming with me!"

"Where?" I said sheepishly. "And why? Isn't Gobber supposed to teach the Dragon Killing stuff?" I haven't exactly traveled far from home, mostly because dad, and everyone else, liked keeping me in a place they could keep track of. But I have been to other islands before, visiting other chiefs.

"You're old enough now, you have to attend the Thing when it's called. Oswald the Agreeable has called for us and we are going. And because of that, I decided I should have a moreâ€¦ direct hand in your training, at least until the Thing is over." The 'Thing', or as it was more formally called the Inter-Tribal Council Meeting, was a meeting of various Viking Tribes for a variety of reasons. To my knowledge, there was not a regularly scheduled time for it, and Vikings just called them when they wanted to show off. Mostly for peaceful purposes, but there were times and occasions they were called for warâ€¦ and dad wanted me to be part of that. I had never been there to my memory, though I knew some of the people who likely would be attending. Specifically, because Oswald was calling which meant it'd be on his land, that meant I'd be meeting Dagur, again. I really hope he became less psychotic since the last time I saw him.

"So why call the Thing nowâ€¦?"

I saw my dad sigh. "Oswald thinks he'll be the next target of the Dragon Raids and he wants us to stand by his side." I gulped like I was trying to swallow a stone.

"But dad," I said.

"Remember," my dad said as he picked up the waraxe for a moment only to return it to me. "When you carry this axe, you carry all of us." My dad then went on a spiel about walking, talking, and thinking like a Viking.

"The conversation is feeling very one-sided," but I did agree with my dad. I didn't want to be me anymore. He ignored my statement and continued on.

"Now, do we have a deal?" I nodded. My dad gave me a smile as he picked up the old cooking pot that I used earlier tonight. "Good, we'll set sail in the morning. Andâ€¦ Boy what'd you make?" He showed me that the pot's bottom had completely vanished, as if something took a bite of it.

"Don't know, but that pot was falling apart anyways." I lied, well partially. I have no idea why it melted like that. "Musta melted." My dad put the cooking pot away and drew a newer one.

That was when I noticed two very important details: First, we were going to intercept a Dragon Raid, meaning I had another shot at the Night Fury. And this time, if I downed it there, I would get the

respect of not just my tribe, but every Tribe in the Barbaric Archipelago. Second, I was holding the large and heavy axe my dad gave me with a single hand. The weight was still there, but it just feltâ€| less than I was used to. I was so wrapped up in my dad's "conversation" that I hadn't noticed what happened. Thanks, Odin. I owe you one.

* * *

><p>"The Hunters have returned!" "All Glory to the Flight!" I heard as we flew into our Home. My Kin's cheers and howls of joy rebounded all over the Nest. I turned and looked behind me, seeing those that flew with me proud and content, happily carrying our haul. In all, it seemed like every other member of our Flight had a mouth full of food, one of those Herd-made wooden cases that held it, or the body of fallen prey. Our Lord was going to be pleased with us, I thought. Maybe mother, too. No, do not get too hopeful.

As mother told me, the Herd, though fierce and vicious as the Kin, offered glory and food unlike any other. And our Lord and the Flight Commanders thought it the best use of our time and lives to pit our Flight constantly against the Herd. I did not understand their reasoning why, since we often lost many of the Kin in our Hunts against the Herd, but that was what was done to receive honor and glory in my Flight. My mother says that I was young and naive, and that time will let me understand things more. I did not doubt her, when she could hear me that is.

Long ago, the cavern had apparently bled fire and liquid rock, now it was a place full of roosts. I landed at one of the ledges near the roof of the massive cavern and looked at what was to happen next. I was not part of the ground Hunting team, so I was not expected to take anything from the Herd in the Hunt. Those Kin that had been my Flight had began emptying their mouths of food, dropping the contents into a massive pit in the ground. Even in the darkness, I could see that our King opened his massive maw.

Our Lord was truly massive. A beast far larger and far greater than any other Kin that I had seen or heard. His body seemed to be nothing short of an impervious armor, his sheer size alone gave the impression of great and boundless power, and his voice was nothing short ofâ€| beautiful. It had this charm to it that you had to hear it to be believed. Yet, the whole Nest knew he was trapped here, unable to escape. That did nothing to stop our loyalty to him. From him came things such as names, gifts, and power each prized greatly in the nest. I do not know how or why he was trapped in the Nest, but he promises one day to be set free and that on that day, those who serve him will be rewarded. And until day comes, we make these offerings off food.

***"Yes, very good,"**I heard our King roar. ***"Your second Hunt as a Squire was very plentiful, Night Fury. Your mother raised you well."** I flinched a bit when I realized my King was speaking to me. There were a over a dozen other Squires and Knights in the Flight with me, all of which had more seniority that I did. The fact that our Lord went out of his way to notice me was important. I was frozen, unable to think of what to make as a proper response.

"Ha-ha-ha. My Lord, you have scared the newest member of my Flight,"

I heard a new voice laugh. I knew who it was. I turned to my left to see one of the Kin land down near me. He was a Monstrous Nightmare. They also had a nasty habit of lighting themselves on fire, sometimes for defense, sometimes because they felt like it. While Nightmares were always expected to be strong and powerful, I knew the one beside me was that and more. Because he was so old, he had many names since served the King faithfully, but his most well known name was One Eye. True to that name, his left eye had been gouged out so badly it left a vicious scar on his face. "Most of the Kin, even a rare and elusive Night Fury, cannot stand beneath your gaze without being reduced to a statue."

Our Lord only just laughed at his servant's jest. **"How could I not take note of a potential future Flight Commander?"** As my King said those words, I had images, ideas, and thoughts form inside my head. And I had the distinct feeling they were not my own. I saw myself, older and stronger, standing over a mound of smoking bodies, both Herd and Kin alike. The one nearest to me was that of my teacher's, burned to a smoldering husk. Which was the preferred method of succession for new Flight Commanders. Behind me were these small, round objects made of this yellowish metal. I did not understand what they were or what they meant. Apparently my King understood my confusion and replaced them with salmon and trout and then I understood he meant wealth.

"It was my honor to serve you my King," I bowed my head as I pushed the thoughts aside. As a Night Fury, I was born to be one of the most powerful and respected Kin under the service of our King. As a Night Fury, I had black scales that offered both protection and stealth in the night sky and Breath that could demolish small hillsides. In my short time Hunting the Herd, those two things made me feel nearly invincible. No one could see me, let alone fight me. By virtue of my race, I was automatically raised to status of Squire when I came of age only a moon ago. But now my King had hopes high enough for me to replace One Eye. I gulped. I was suddenly less proud of myself.

"Now, if only there were more of you," **said our King, referring to the fact that me and my mother were the only Night Furies in the whole nest. And as far as I knew, in the whole ocean. **"In time, I will offer you power and glory, maybe even a name of your own." A name issued from our King was a great status symbol. A congratulatory sign that came with it great distinction and honors. I normally did not need one as the only other Night Fury in the nest was my mother, who already has a name of her own.

"A name my Lord?" I asked cautiously. But a name was a mark of prestige, a sign of favor from our Lord.

"Yes, but you have still yet to earn that honor, this good haul only serves to make up for your previous blunder." **he said flatly. I reeled back, ashamed of myself. My first Hunt produced many casualties by accident as I failed to understand how to defeat the stone and wooden spires the Prey built. That soured my reputation within my Flight and required that temporarily commoners had to be diverted from a healthier Flight. **"The other Flight Commanders will be returning soon and we have things to discuss that do not concern you yet."

"You are dismissed for now, Squire," I heard my master say. "Go and

see to your needs." I bowed my head again and flew out of the large hole in the Nest's roof.

I flew to one of the beaches that surrounded the Nest. Though I knew my Lord's intentions were well meaning, I could not help but feel the images he gave me were nothing short of horrifying. Though I was young and strong and my teacher was aged and weakening with each moon, I just could not wrap my mind around having to kill my aging teacher. And what if One Eye knew of that intention? Would he take preemptive measures to protect himself? _Best not to think about that._

I landed near the water's edge. I saw other Kin there. I beheld two heads of a lone zippleback, amidst the small crowd of Gronckles and Nadders. All of them approached me cautiously, slowly as if I were a fragile egg. I went closer to them, and they reeled back. They were commoners, lowly Kin who did not distinguish themselves by blood, merit, or creed. And I was on the path to Knighthood, they were beneath me._ All I had to do is remind them that, right?_

As I drew closer, they backed away again, but only the Zippleback stayed. "Do you have something to say to me?" I snapped at him. Or was it her or it? I could never understand that part.

"The King took notice of you," a Zippleback head said with a bow.

Its twin then followed it up. "We wish to congratulate you."

At least they were respectful. I smirked at them back. I knew they were probably just rubbing up to me just to gain a small degree of recognition, even if it came from association, but I did not care about those things. If they made themselves useful to me, I did not have any problem with that. "Then I thank you. If-

"Not all of us are here to suck up to you." I turned my head to the source of the voice. It was an aged Gronckle whose scales were a faded old bronze. The Gronckle stepped forward, causing the Zippleback to step back and the kin cleared around us. "You may have been born into the Knighthood, but you are still unworthy of the King's attentions."

"Is there something you _want_ to say to me?" I spat. To put a long story there were a lot of Kin who did not like that I was automatically made into a Squire by virtue of my being a Night Fury. My detractors state that had I been born as anything else, it would have been clear I was a poor candidate for such a position. Typically, they were commoners, other Squires, and Knights.

"Aye," the bronze scaled Kin said. "Have you made any kills in the King's service?" I blinked at that. This wasâ€¦ new. No one had ever criticized me about something like that before.

"Well, I of course, I have made kills. Those giant wood and stone spires that the Herd," I stated proudly. Those were the

"No," the Gronckle cut me off. "Not that, those things do not bleed, they do not scream. You haven't killed anything of honor have you?"

"I'm sure that I slew some of the Herd when I destroy their spires."

"I doubt it, Prey is hardier than you give them credit for," the Gronckle scoffed. "But even if you did, those were orders given to you by One Eye and the intention was to destroy the spires. Kills made by those actions do not count."

"What are you getting at?" I approached the old one, but he did not so much bat an eye or even flinch.

"Have you killed Herd or Kin of your decision?" he said calmly.

"Um, no I have not. I fail to see how that is important."

"You are a warrior now and as a warrior you must also be expected to do battle against the Herd and against rogue and honorless Kin. A kill, made of your own volition is proof of your lethality and prowess as a warrior. You have proven you have no bloodthirst."

"I have plenty of bloodthirst." I said that on pure reflex. Only after I had said it have I realized how childish I sounded saying that. And the Gronckle knew it based on the look his eyes. I could tell that the attention of the large group of Kin by me were focused on the old one. "And I have nothing to kill for honor."

"But you do, you may kill me and redeem your honor," he said, unafraid.

I considered that for a moment. I could kill him, quite easily now that I thought about it, and shut up one of my detractors, permanently. On the other hand, there was just no point to it. He was just an old, old Gronckle. Not a threat to me. Plus, I could respect him, he was unafraid of dying by my paws. "I do not need to kill you," I said. "I will simply instead kill one of the Herd when I have the chance the next raid. I can wait that long."

The Gronckle nodded, my answer apparently contenting him. "Then I will look forward to your return." He then walked away for a few steps before something large and black land on him.

"Dead Wings has returned!" "Run for your lives!" I heard screaming coming from every direction. My Kin and I ran away from the Gronckle in droves. I leapt and hid behind a rock, having no intention to look at the grisly scene that was playing out just out of my field of vision. The Gronckle was screaming in raw agony and I did nothing but hid. _I could save him, _I told myself. But I was simply too scared to get out of my hiding place_. _The worst part was, I knew he was going to _live._

"This is a warning, next time, I will not be as _merciful," _I heard the dark thing speak.

"I do not fear you," I heard the Gronckle croak as he stopped screaming. I could see the glowing eyes of my Kin looking as the scene had concluded. I peered alongside them. The Gronckle's wings were torn into ribbons and I could see blood pouring out from the wounds. He likely wasn't going to fly again without having sort of healing done to him. I saw the Gronckle get up and slip away, the creature that attacked it having done what it intended.

"Which is such a shame, it would have made that all the more _enjoyable."_ Then I saw the creature turn its attention to me giving me both a better picture of the scene. "Hello, child," said the female Night Fury.

"H-hey mom," I said sheepishly. My mother is a Night Fury, obviously, but she is somewhat bigger than me, by somewhere around the length of my own head. Her only name was Dead Wings. While she was a Flight Commander, she was the only one of them to not have more than one name. She did not _need_ to have more than one name, when her only one had so many different meanings. And right now, I had just seen one of them.

"You should have defended your honor when that commoner questioned you, child," my mother stated. "Now others see you as weak. And now that others see you as weak, they see _me _as weak." _And that was why she wanted to make an example._ By disabling and not killing the wizened Gronckle she had made him suffer. His injury would be no excuse to his task of getting food for the King and given he lacked flight, he would have been very vulnerable and easily slain. It was not about killing, it was about _suffering._

"Sorry mother," I said. "Itâ€| won't happen again."

"Good," she smiled and went on her own way. All things considered I got off lucky, if she wasn't punishing me.

I looked around and saw that the remaining Kin who were still staring at me. I did not like the fact they all saw what had happened, my relationship with my mother was none of their business. "What are you all staring at?" I roared. "Get away!" They ran.

I was alone. And I preferred it would stay that way.

* * *

><p>Author's Notes:

Now that I built enough confidence up to write a story and got a solid idea, I started this. Anyone who has read my other story "This is not Berk" will probably be familiar with some of the content that will end up in this fic. I can assure you all that it isn't the exact same thing as what ended up there, but you will see some overlap.

In case any of you failed to understand what Trader Johann has in that secret chest of his. The items are a rubber chicken, a very primitive steam engine, and gunpowder with a recipe. This is a deliberate case of "It Will Never Catch On" meant to be a gag.

Yes, in this fic's verse, baby Magnus is actually older than Hiccup and gang. I thought it would make for a funny "off screen" gag if Hiccup actually fixed her issue.

The reason why Hiccup and Stoic's chat at home went out differently than it did in the movies is **_because**_** Hiccup failed to shoot down Toothless and thus never learned that he could not kill willingly kill a dragon. **

****Toothless's snippet was the hardest to write for because his is the only one who deals with himself and dragon kind Plusâ€¦ I needed to explain how dragon culture works in this fic.****

****Yes, I used feudal terms to describe dragon society. And Herd is what they use to describe the Viking Tribes, and Hunts to describe their attacks. That should give you an idea of what they think about humans. ****

****One Eye may share his name with a dragon in the books, but is otherwise, not related or based at all on him.****

****Basic hierarchy breakdown: Commoners Squires Knights Flight CommandersKing/Lord****

2. Chapter 2

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****I'm going to try to get chapters up regularly and have consistent word counts so to prevent myself from losing enthusiasm in the story.****

****I will note that there are book references and things of that nature. Just with weird twists applied to them.****

****This chapter was harder for me to write than the last, as my mind kept wandering into future events in the story that will not be relevant for a long while. As its quality may or may not be different from the last one's.****

****Please remember to review and provide constructive criticism. Also, if anyone checks my Author page, I added some notes to it pertaining to this story.****

*** * ***

><p>I was blessed by the gods. That was the only way I could put it. Some people get a lucky and take down a dragon and be paraded around as a hero for a few days. No, not me, I have just been given the chance to completely change my whole life. The Norns just probably owe me interest.

First, the potion worked and I was quite enjoying my newfound strength. It did not make me as strong as my dad, or Snotlout, or Fishlegs, but I felt I could reasonably stand up to the twins in an arm wrestling challenge, not that I would want to challenge them at any rate. Second is the fact that by some action of cosmic proportions, I had a second shot at taking down a Night Fury. And there were two of them now, so I had better odds than I did yesterday morning. Third, the weather was better than normal, perfect in fact. With the skies were clear and the winds at our backs, our sails pulled us full speed away. Fourth and most importantly, I had a chance to impress not only the Hairy Hooligans, not only every Viking tribe in the Archipelago, but Astrid as well. And Snotlout, too, but I was not very sure how much I wanted to do that.

When I had seen them on the docks at the boat father set up for me, I had originally thought that maybe they were off to see me off or give me some last minute insults. I was not expecting all of them to go board the ship along side of me.

Apparently, I was the last person informed about it, but because Snotlout and I were required to attend the Thing due to tribal law, it caused some problems in the Dragon Training class roster to simply remove just the two of us. That plus because Dragon Training was a _team _effort, Gobber and dad just decided the simplest solution would have been to send my whole class along with me. So now, I was stuck in a longboat with Fishlegs, Astrid, Snotlout, the twins, and along with the sailors my dad instructed to watch us. _Look on the bright side, maybe once everything is all said and done, you can actually start calling them your friends. _

I could tell by their faces only my cousin and I were the only one who was even remotely thrilled about this voyage and that was likely due to the fact we both had things we wanted to accomplish. For me, it was getting that Night Fury and for Snotlout, it was to show off in front of every tribe that showed up and have some 'fun time' with Dagur. Snotlout was looking at his own reflection in a mirror he acquired from Trader Johann. Tuffnut and Ruffnut were extremely bored of looking out at the sea. And Fishlegs was mostly content to reading from a copy of the Book of Dragons he owned. And Astrid rotated between juggling and maintaining her axe.

I also had weapons to take care of. Because I did trust anyone other than Fishlegs with the black book in my possession, I decided it would be a good idea to prepare myself for the "Dragon Training" my father had planned for me. While I did bring the axe my father gave last night, that was at best my fallback weapon. As strong as I was now, I still could not throw an axe far enough for me to hit my goal. That was why I brought with me a crossbow of my own making. Made of a lightweight mix of wood and steel, I actually could have carried it if I was stillâ€|weak. I made it before I designed the bola launcher, but abandoned the plan when I realized that a single bolt was not going to take down the Night Fury for me. Of course, that was where my secret weapon comes inâ€|

I didn't have much time to think about my plans as I was interrupted. "Gah! This is so boring!" said Ruffnut, breaking the silence that had started since we all left. I counted it amongst my blessings that they did not immediately swarm me with insults and quietly went on the boat with me.

"Why can't we have stayed behind?" Tuffnut added.

"Where we weren't going to die of boredom."

Before I could react and defend myself, Snotlout butted in. "Well, who cares about that? We're going to be full Viking warriors, in a raid, with our allied tribes standing nearby, ready to be impressed. Gonna kill me a Monstrous Nightmare before the Graduation." I used to hate Snotlout, back when we were kids. He had been something of a bully that constantly tormented me when we were younger, but he had since cooled down especially in the past year. Never understood why, but I believe it had to do with shifting his focus on trying to attract Astrid. Lately, he had only really taken to name calling and mocking me when I actually did deserve it or when Thawfest was

involved.

"You do know we don't know if the dragons will attack or not?" Fishlegs said, "I mean, we know they usually go after the Great Tribes in a particular order, but maybe they would do the smart thing and take an undefended village or something instead?" That was something I hadn't considered. Would dragons have the sense to notice that Fort Sinister was more heavily defended than usual and take an easier target? Not to mention we had no idea of when the raid will start. For all we knew, it could have easily happened today and we were already late.

Snotlout, apparently ignoring the statement Fishlegs made, flexed his left bicep and gave it a hard, audible tap, as if for emphasis. "With these babies I'm going to kill off every dragon and sweep off all of the babes. Wanna see?" He looked at Astrid with a wolfish grin, to which she replied with a blow to the nose. "Hey, not the face! Not the face!" said Snotlout as he clutched his wounded nose.

Astrid backs away from the wounded Viking and turned back to me, making me feel uncomfortable. "I hate to say it, but the twins are right," -Ruffnut interjects with mumbled "ouch" at this point, "We shouldn't be going to a dragon raid especially not you." It is not a secret that both Snotlout and I, plus a bunch of other boys our age, had a crush on Astrid. Mostly, she just tends to ignore it and look at us like we were fools. Which to be fair, some of us, myself included, were. I realized a long time ago that I had no chance to get her to notice me outside of mess-ups, but that was then, this was now.

"And I whole heartedly agree." said Snotlout, predictably retracting all of his previous statements the moment Astrid got involved. "We should all go home."

"Thank you all for being so optimistic," I defended myself. "It was not my idea to take us all."

"And your dad didn't bring any dragons. How does he expect us to do dragon training without them?" Astrid continued. I cringed, knowing the answer. The shield-maiden-in-training noticed the look on my face and stated: "You know something?"

"Sorta kinda Dad actually told me this last night over dinner."

"And?"

In that moment, I turned to Fishlegs, which in turn caused everyone to turn to him. The large boy gave a small squeak of surprise. "Uh yeah?" He said sheepishly. Fishlegs had been my best friend for a long time. Both of us always had unusual tastes and that had more or less kept us apart from the other Viking children. We were close friends growing up, but that relationship had somewhat deteriorated ever since he had a growth spurt and became the largest teenager in our age group. Even then, we still shared information and hung out every now and again, always in secret. It was also because of that, he was the only one who knew what my father was planning; not because he actually knew my father's plans, but because he knew the source material my dad was using. In fact, I was pretty sure he knew it better than I did.

"You remember when Gobber told us about how Vikings did 'dragon training' before they started capturing dragons?" Fun Fact, when Vikings first settled in the Barbaric Archipelago, they preferred to kill their dragons instead of capturing them. Capturing them for study and training came later after Bork the Bold published "the Book of Dragons". Dad, trying to squeeze both a training routine into a diplomatic meeting was going to bring back an old Viking fallback since dragons were not likely going available for us to train on. Fortunately for us, we only needed to stick to it as long as we were still at Oswald's island.

I saw my friend go pale. "Your dad is kidding right?" I shook my head. "We're so doomed." He then promptly started listing the most notable events of the training course and describing them using terms like "Challenge Rating", "Insanity Factor", and "Traumatic Disorder Inducing". Notable exercises included building and sailing a raft while your teacher tried to set it on fire and running through town while everyone pelted you with objects, typically rocks and dirty linens from sailors. _Painful head injuries or losing your sense of smellâ€| Which of these is 'better'?_ Each exercise was meant to replicate, at least in part situations a Viking would encounter a dragon. In the two examples given, they were meant to represent sailing while under a dragon attack and moving through a village during a raid.

While the training was effective enough to make capable dragon killing warriors as lethal as the more modern method, it had numerous drawbacks. It was a hastily designed training method that often took so much time just to set up for each exercise. Collateral damage was also an issue, as well sometimes students getting killed on a training exercise, but that was an "occupational hazard" as my dad put it. It was as close as my father can get to dragon training without actually having any dragons.

Everyone sat in stunned silence, contemplating what the large teen had said. Astrid did not appear to react, but Snotlout mumbled something about "being like Thawfest". I had already made up my mind about it, and I decided, it did not matter what kind of training I had to go through. I wanted to be the best Viking in my generation. And dad was going to see it. That's all that mattered.

This time, Tuffnut was the one to speak first. "Awesome, when do we start?"

* * *

><p>Every moon, when it has disappeared from the night sky, swallowed completely by its darkened half, our King makes a roar so loud that it reaches us seemingly no matter how far away we are. Our King's Voice could be felt no matter how far away we were from him. Even if you could not hear the roar, you could feel it in your bones and in your heart. Some of the elder Kin have said that it stretched beyond the merely physical and reached into the spiritual where it resonated within all of us.<p>

His Call was not a command, but an invitation. A formal request for Kin to enter into the Nest where he was held. There was no real penalty for refusing it, but there was plenty to be gained. By pledging fealty and offering gifts and services, our Lord maintained

the peace and settled disputes between the different Kin and even offered gifts and power in turn. It was also a time to discuss the successes and failures of the Flights and Flight Commanders and to honor pacts.

Regardless of what is brought to our Lord, you must bring something; we were all guests in his home and we were expected to act properly. The punishment for being a poor guest was immediate death at the paws of the whole Nest, if not the King's massive jaws. The two most common types of offers were food and skill. Food was the offering typical of commoners as they rarely had anything to distinguish themselves. The only ones who were not required to bring gifts were Kin who were already the King's personal servants, such as being in the Knighthood or other special roles. They instead brought their skills as their offerings. Though it was common for Kin to bring both their skills and an item as a way of showing extra devotion.

As a Squire, I also enjoyed a special privilege exclusive to those in the Knighthood. Around my Lord, there are three stone platforms that together formed the shape of a triangle, each dedicated to one of the Flight Commanders, and elevated so low that the red fog that surrounded the lowest reaches of the Nest covered up to my knees, obscuring them. While normally, the area in the middle of the platforms was vacant, during my King's audience, he would poke his head out in that space. This time, it would be my first meal being this close to him. Best part of this all was the commoners were not allowed to attend and my mother was seated elsewhere. After the events of the previous night, I did not want to deal either of them again anytime soon.

Seeing my King's massive jaws and six-eyed face poking up out of the fog simply took my breath away. I was simply in awe by how utterly massive he was now that I saw just how big his head was up close. I struggled to believe that my King was real for a moment. At that point, One Eye smacked me on the head with a laugh. "The first time is always like that," he said. "You'll get used to it." Apparently, this was something of a tradition as all of my fellow Squires and Knights laughed alongside him.

They all stopped their laughing when our Lord spoke; his voice shook the whole Nest. **"I thank you all here for gathering this night, my faithful servants. From the lowest commoners, to eager Squires, to the Honorable Knights, to the most loyal of Flight Commanders, I thank you for sharing in this meal with me."** As loud as my King was, especially this close to his gapping maw, it was still not as unsettling as yesterday when he had taken notice of me in lieu of every other Squire and Knight. I did however still have the feeling that he was looking at me intently.

I saw every one of the other Kin bow curly down at our Lord. Not wanting to feel left out or having a death wish, I went along with them. "We humbly serve," said everyone.

"Then, I invite you to partake of this meal." At that point, our King spat out a large glob of partially eaten food from his maw and placed it in the center of the stone platform I was on. My Flight gathered around it slowly in a circle. All in all, there were twenty-four Knights and Squires combined in my Flight, excluding One Eye, the Flight Commander. Eight Gronckles, seven Nadders, five

Zipplebacks, three Nightmares and myself. There was twenty-five of us, but an overzealous Nightmare had fallen during the attack yesterday morning. My King then proceeded to lay down more fish piles in each of the two other platforms.

I licked my lips in anticipation, the sharing of food in such a way had a deep symbolic meaning to the Kin. It represented almost always a form of affection or of dependence from the one offering the meal. Often, our first meals were served this way by our parents after we freshly hatch from our eggs. In this case, it meant we were subservient to the King. I was hungry and I could barely wait any longer to sink my retractable teeth into a swordfish I was eyeing and based on the looks I got from the other Squires near me, I wasn't the only one who felt the same way. Tradition dictated that the Flight Commanders take the first bite.

I did not have to wait long as my Flight Commander, One Eye, take a large tuna before yelling, "Dig in, kids." My Flight exploded into a chorus of ecstatic, screams and roars as all dove into the pile of food. I had to race with a Nadder for the item I wanted, but I was faster and the Nadder settled for a few slain hens. Though the food mound was plentiful enough for us all, it was not large enough for all of us to eat in a comfortable manner. It was a frantic struggle which had no order to it at all. Claws, tails, and teeth made small wounds in both their owners and their allies as my Kin thrashed in a frenzy.

I did not know long any of us had spent eating, but at the end when the last morsels were miniscule sardines and leftover blood, I could not help but feel content with myself. I was strong and quick which let me gorge myself. Only those who were fit enough were fed and I had just proved myself to be fit enough to be full. That was the law. I laid on my stomach to try and wait for my insides to digest its contents. I could hear a faint, well, not really faint, chuckle come from the center of the room. _Clearly my Lord finds this all amusing._

When I looked I could tell, most of the other Squires and Knights had already drifted into a deep sleep. For a moment, I thought about joining them, but then, I could see that my teacher, One Eye had made his way towards our Lord. Being curious about what was happening, I decided to stay up longer and see what was happening. "My Lord, I know it is not my place to question you," said my teacher. "But are you sure ofâ€| my next task? We are forming a Hunt so soon and my Flight has not yet fully healed."

***"Yes, the Herd is massing at the next Hunting Ground." **The King said. ***"You must strike them before their defenses become too strong."**

"My Lord, I believe we should focus our offenses elsewhere," I heard someone say. I recognized faintly it was my mother. I could see that she had blood drip out of her lips. I hoped it was from the cattle and fish. "The Herd will have left their other dens less protected, many of which are still in disrepair. It might be more prudent for us, instead to Hunt them indirectly."

"And risk irrecoverably destroying or damaging a healthy Herd settlement?" A smaller, squeakier voice said. "The Herd is resilient, but not resilient enough to withstand overharvesting." I turned and

looked to find in the distance a small Terrible Terror, his head barely sticking out of the fog. Terrors had an interesting place in the Nest. They were not required to gather food for the King and instead did various menial tasks, such as mending wounds, cleaning, or hunting pests. And because of their small size, it was impossible, or so I thought, that any one of them could enter the Knighthood to get this close to the King. So I was surprised to find a Terror, unafraid of my mother, involving himself in an conversation with the King and two Flight Commanders, all of which were bigger than him.

"Then what do you propose?" challenged my mother. "We cannot stand by and do nothing!"

"I disagree, we can do exactly that," the Terror eyed the King. "If you be willing my Lord, we could wait out for the Herd forces to leave the Hunting Ground before we strike." I saw my King and One Eye consider his words intently. That was when I realized who this Terror was. I had always thought it was a joke played out by the older Knights to trick us Squires, but here it was. I was seeing and hearing it with my own senses. He was a Flight Commander, an equal to both my mother and One Eye. What did this little Kin do to earn such a distinction? I knew next to nothing about this one, neither his name or his deeds.

***"Both of your ideas have merit in them," **I heard my King say.
***"But, neither of them suit my designs. It is imperative that this Hunt is carried out while the Herd gathered, but not before they become too strong. I want the Hunt to begin in the next sunrise."
***What did my King have planned? Was there something important about the timing of this or where we needed to go? I felt that those questions were things I apparently shared with the Flight Commanders, but they did not ask those questions aloud.

Finally, after a moment of contemplation, I could see that One Eye had built up the will to make a question of the King. "My Lord, I will carry out your orders, then. Before," my teacher said. "Please, I do think that a Hunt for food is worth risking the lives of my Flight."

***"Then it shall be a Hunt for Glory. Slay as much of the Herd as you can. Burn and destroy. The Herd must be culled for attempting to defend itself so," **our King said. I sat up. Hunting for food was the normal goal of the hunt. Warriors such as myself and others in the Knighthood would do combat against the Herd and their defenses, while commoners would attempt to capture food. Some commoners fought, but only in desperation. A Hunt for Glory was rarer. It was meant to be a killing; food was a secondary priority and even commoners were ordered to slay Herd. It was not about who could gather the most food, it was about who could take the most kills. The orders basically boiled down to "cause as much destruction and death as possible." I was anxious now, I now had a perfect opportunity to prove myself to my Flight. My King then performed what I thought was a smirk across his giant maw. ***"It appears that a Squire does not like the comfort of sleep on the Eve of a Hunt," **he addressed me. The Flight Commanders turned and looked at me. I was prepared for it this time and I did not flinch.

"So this is your protÃ©gÃ©e, One Eye?" said the Terror as he examined me from afar. "And your son, Dead Wings? Greetings child, I had not

had the chance to meet you yet. I wish you good Hunting on dawn."

"Thank you, Flight Commander," I bowed politely. Terror or not, he still outranked me and it was best to show manners when everyone else around you could crush you into a pulp. "I will do my best. Give me targets, and I will take them down."

It was at this point that my King showed me an image. They were those things the Herd made from fallen trees to travel across the oceans. I wondered for a moment how the Herd made them float over the water and One Eye once compared it to how birds knew how to built a nest. It was just something they knew to do. **"Night Fury, these are your targets for your next assignment, destroy these before all others. Herd and other Herd-made construction are to be destroyed after you are done with these." **I nodded.

My mother interjected. "My King, allow me to join in this Hunt, my son is too inexperienced, too weak to handle such a large force by himself. And One Eye's Flight is still not fully healed. My Flight's wounds have healed enough for us to join the fight." For a moment, I felt insulted, but I had to accept that she was right. I did not know where the Hunt was, let alone how best to handle it.

Our King responded with nothing but a chuckle. **"You may go, but I expect you to be subservient to Flight Commander One Eye for the duration of this task." **

I saw mother's eyes glint with a hint of anger and rage at my leader, no one else seemed to notice or cared to notice. "Of course, I understand, my Lord."

"Then while you all are away, I shall be off to other priorities that need my attention," said the Terror. I can hear my King purr with approval. It sounded strange since he was so large. The others nodded. "Then, I bid you good bye." And with that, the little Kin disappeared underneath the fog as he was so small.

"Get some rest, Squire." One Eye said to me as I lied down. "We have a big day ahead of us." He was sleeping before I could turn to respond to him.

I tried my hardest to sleep, but that action was harder than I thought it should have been. Even though earlier, I was weary having eaten a full meal, something else was inside of me. I was filled with anxiety and also excitement. Tomorrow night was going to be a big Hunt. I had plenty to both gain and lose. While I could also make my first kill in the King's honor, it was very likely I could die as well. It was rare for two Flights to join in the same Hunt. From the tales I heard from storytellers when growing up, they were only done in times when the Kin were desperate or expecting great danger.

My thoughts were interrupted by my mother approaching me. I went still, pretending I was asleep. "Child, you better not shame me again," she said. "If you fail to make a kill, do not return to the Nest until you do." And then she went away.

I was not going to sleep tonight.

* * *

><p>Fort Sinister was built by the Romans long, long ago. My grandfather had told me that it had originally been a colony or some sort of staging point for their ships. They believed that the island would allow them easy access to the Barbaric Archipelago and its dragons. They wanted to go domesticate the beasts to further strengthen their empire. But apparently, Roman troops were ill suited to the chaotic air and ground warfare that dragons reveled in. For their arrogance, the Fort had been ransacked and overrun. That ended direct Roman involvement in these seas to this day.

The beasties then took the stone fort as their own nest and even when ruined it served as a near impenetrable bastion of defense. I say "nearly" because my father was among those who drove out the dragons for the Fortress. Back before Oswald and I were even in our fathers' thoughts, they took Fort Sinister as the finale of a lengthy Quest. And when Oswald's father became the Great High Chieftain of the Berserker Tribe, he moved in and taken the fortress to be the new home and Great Hall for his Tribe. And Oswald inherited it from him.

Having more people than Berk, the Berserker settlement had both more houses and took up more space than I what I seen on my own home. Unfortunately, that made them too big to fit within the stone walls of the original Roman fortress and only a fourth of the settlement was protected behind the old walls. Though in a dragon raid, high walls were often a drawback as the beasts could _fly over them_. It did however mean that human opponents were had to be really crazy to launch any sort of assault.

It had turned dark by the time we landed on the island, much sooner than I had originally thought. Normally, we would have arrived by the time dawn came, but it seems that Ægir, god of the sea, and Kári, god of wind, were very favorable to us this time. With a few orders, I ordered the men to take us in to dock. The Berserker harbormasters were expecting us. They greeted us with cheers and anticipation for the coming battle.

Already moored to the port, I could make out the designs and names of a few Bog Burglar and Meathead vessels. That mean the two tribes who were on the receiving end of the new raids were out for revenge. I welcomed the sight, though I was going to have to remember to check if I still had my underclothes. They did not call them Bog Burglars for nothing. I disembarked my ship first, and greeted the locals with a yell. I trusted my brother and second in command, Spitelout to take care of the unloading. This, not being my first time on Oswald's land, I knew what to expect from this visit.

I went to see my son and his friends once I had the time. I could see a small smile in his face as he put away his weapons. I knew what he was thinking. He was only really looking forward to down one of the Night Furies in the coming raid. That was the only reason he was not complaining about this voyage; he had a goal and he did not care about the little nuisances that got in the way of it. Not even Dagur, and that boy was not all right in the head. I had a little hope that maybe, just maybe that Odin would take pity on my son. Let him take down the Night Fury, let me be proud to call him my son. I had to force myself to stop lingering on these thoughts. I was here for a mission and I had to appear strong and proud.

The Berserker warriors escorted us, myself, my son, his friends, and a few of my most trusted warriors to Fort Sinister to find our lodgings. Having made multiple visits in the past, my son and I both knew most of our way around the village and fortress itself. We arrived inside the Fort faster than I expected. It was then the guards split us up, leaving me alone while everyone else would be taken to bed. Which was fine by me, I needed to meet the other Oswald, privately. We had things to discuss.

I found Oswald, in his dining room, alone. He was sipping a bottle of what was likely mead when I came in. "Damn you Stoic, why couldn't you come during sunrise?" Oswald coughed. "You're too early! Mogadon and Bertha at least had the decency to come at a time when everyone was awake." Mogadon being the chieftain for the Meatheads with his son Thuggory and Bertha being the Bog Burglar chief with her daughter Camicazi. They likely already went to bed.

I only responded with a smile of amusement. "Blame the sea and sky, they made me hurry. Wouldn't miss another opportunity to save your ass." This made my friend's features soften a little. Us chiefs, me, Oswald, Bertha, and Mogadon, were all friends of a sort. Back when we were old enough to start traveling and fighting but young enough not to become chiefs, we often crossed paths and blades in every sort of manner. We all respected each other, which in Viking terms meant that we often threw axes and spears at each other's heads.

Oswald shook his head. "And I've been told you had brought more than your son this time."

To which I replied. "Dragon Training class? You did the same thing for me."

The other chieftain gave a sigh. "That may cause problems, though it may be less depending on how much they are all willing to share their rooms." Oswald said. "We can set up proper rooms for everyone in the morning. It is too late to make rearrangements. For now, we have more important matters to discuss." Then we discussed the terms of my stay. It was just the standard thing a guest was entitled to on his stay. Warm food, good sheltering, that sort of thing. There were a couple of provisions I did have to ask about. As predicted, Oswald could not offer his captured dragons for me to use in training. He did however allow us to perform the 'old school' training method I would be using for our stay. And Hiccup was not allowed anywhere near any of the armories and smithies on the island. Which was understandable given what happened last time. We do not talk about it. "Now are there any questions, Stoic?"

"Yes, why are you doing this?" I said. Oswald looked at me with sad disapproval in his face. "We both know your tribe this action is going to be seen as weakness." Oswald turned away from me a scowl forming. Oswald, though a great warrior and leader, did not live up to all of the ideals of the Berserker Tribe. He was simply put, far too peaceful most of the time for the likings of some of its members. His title had originally been meant as an insult. Within the throes of Rage or what he called a "highly spirited debate", I had seen the man sink ships unarmed. But outside of those moments of intense anger and destruction, he was simply not interested in killing everything in anger.

"I have to do what is best for my people, Stoic," the man said.

"Even if it means having to go against them, sometimes."

"Dagur will kill you over this," I said. While it was true the majority of his Tribe loved and respected him, there were those who sought to destroy him. Especially his own son. Hiring aid from the other Tribes would be all the fire that child to dispose of his weakened father."

"Aye, he willâ€|" agreed Oswald. "I've lost my thirst for blood."

Oswald did not deserve to die this way. He was a great friend and a true leader. Yet for all of his good qualities, there was one that stood out so much that it was his flaw. He loved his son enough to see past the child's failings, no matter how great they were. He loved Dagur more than I could say I loved Hiccup.

* * *

><p>We were escorted by the Berserker warriors to what was probably our rooms. The Hooligan warriors that Stoic sent with us had separated from our group and were sent to a different part of the fortress, while us dragon trainees had been taken to some special guest bedrooms. I had never been this far from Berk before, so lodging in an old Roman fort was a new experience. I considered for a moment of thinking that coming here might actually be enriching.<p>

For us, warriors in training, there were three rooms. Apparently, these rooms were reserved for the Heirs of the tribes that Chief Oswald called, but they, understandably were not expecting Stoic to bring five extra guests. Thankfully for us, the Bog Burglar and Meathead Heirs were willing to share rooms. Apparently Hiccup had promised them favors to make up for them and said that they would be rooming with trustworthy fellows. Tuffnut and Snotlout were going to lodge with a taller, muscled boy by the name of Thuggory; Hiccup and Fishlegs got their own room; while us girls, Ruffnut and I were sharing a room with Camicazi.

The guest bedrooms were scantily furnished having at most, two large beds and a dresser. Not enough for three adults, but just fine for a couple of kids like us. As much as I did not want to be on this stupid voyage. At least, I could spend some time with Ruffnut.

"Finally, a room I do not have to share with my annoying brother!" said Ruffnut.

"But you're still sharing it with usâ€|" I corrected.

"But you're not my brother!" she said.

A third voice interrupted, our room-mate. "Well finally, there's some other girls here. I was getting tired of having to look at all these brutish men," she said. It took me a moment to realize that she looked, very, very much like me. With the exception of her hair being a wild mess and her clothing, she looked much like I did. I had to look at my own reflection in my axe to compare ourselves properly. With the right makeup and the right clothing, I could swear we could pass for twins better than even Ruffnut and Tuffnut did. "Wow, you

look like me. Fancy that?" she apparently noticed the same thing and I could tell it excited her. "Well, my name's Camicazi, what's your's?"

"Astrid Hofferson," I said as I introduced us both. "And this is Ruffnut Thorston."

"Heyâ€|" my friend said wearily with a raise of her hand.

And then I realized something important. She was the Bog Burglar Heir, a member of a Viking Tribe known for their obsession with stealing things. Which meant that I had to be careful about where I put my stuff. I would really hate it if someone took my axe from me. "Will you be stealing from us?" I would have said if I was planning on not being polite to the actual owner of the room.

Camicazi seemed to read my expression and responded without prompting "No. I won't, I've got better things to steal."

I accepted her answeâ€|"Hey wait! What's that supposed to mean?" Then I realized it was a backhanded compliment.

"I mean to say none of your things look at that impressive enough to steal. Plus, it'd be too easy. Especially that axe," the girl said with a smirk.

No one insulted me and got away with it. Especially not my axe. I raised said axe and leveraged it at her. "Is that supposed to mean anything?"

"Yes, it does." The girl in turn drew a sword that was apparently on her waist. She seemed thrilled at the sight. "Even an old beggar wouldn't take your stuff."

"Ooh! Now I'm really liking this trip." Ruffnut said. "Front row seats."

The two of us, me and Camicazi, fought. "You do not look so bad for a Hooligian. My mother said that the only good Hooligan was a dead one." She lunged at me with a vertical swipe of her sword.

I parried the strike with my axe. "Ha, that's funny, my father said that the only good Bog Burglar was a dead one, too."

The fight had lasted for aboutâ€| five minutes without any of us making any real progress. Our conversation devolved into senseless babbling and I could swear Ruffnut had gotten bored once it became clear it was a stand still. Eventually, we both stopped once we realized that we were not doing anything to hurt each other. "You're not bad for a Hooligan," Camicazi said as she sheathed her sword. "But your stuff still ain't worth stealing."

"Well, fine, I don't want you taking my stuff, anyways," I huffed. I realized at the last second my mistake made me sound like a fool so I added: "Side's you couldn't take my stuff anyways."

"Oh is that a challenge?" Camicazi piped.

"Yeah, I'm challenging you," I said. Camicazi smiled a bit.

"Ooh, Round Two," Ruffnut said. And thus began a competition of trying to outdo each other. _Was this how the other Tribes tended to act around each other? _I wondered.

* * *

><p>Back when I was little, I used to have nightmares about staying in these rooms. Not the dragons, actual nightmares. I remember my dad telling me that they used to be a maximum security dungeons back when the Romans still held them. And unfortunately being the imaginative boy that I was, I ended up dreaming that I was being held hostage by a fat Consul and a Prefect. I grew out of them, but I found my myself looking back at those really strange dreams whenever I visit Oswald.<p>

I had not had time to read the book Trader Johann gave me since last night after making a second project when I learned my strength potion worked. Suffice it to say, I did not want anyone other than Fishlegs, who I trusted to be responsible with the knowledge I was about to share with him. It had to bribe Camicazi and Thuggory, two somewhere-slightly-above-acquaintances of mine, with the promise of making them some special weapons in the future. _It would be worth it,_ I told myself.

"Did you hear that?" Fishlegs said as he listened to one of the walls. "I hear metal clanging."

"Yeah, I figured that would happen," I said. "I think we should leave them alone." I saw Fishlegs agree. I knew enough about Camicazi because of Chieftain meetings involving our parents. Back when I first met her, I thought she was Astrid. I had hoped the two would never meet, because I had realized both of them had a bit of a competitive streak. I did not want to know was going on in their room right now.

I changed subjects and showed Fishlegs the book. He did not believe me when I said that the book had all sorts of arcane things when I first told him. Much like how no one will believe in trolls without proof. So I tried performing tricks with my axe like twirling it and juggling it between my hands. It did not last long. I made a mistake and the axe had been thrown into thrown into the dresser. I might have "heightened coordination and boosted physical strength", but apparently I still had the lousy axe throwing skills. May just be the fact I am still new at this; I could never hold an axe properly until last night. Still, given how _deep_ the axe dug into the wood, it was all the convincing Fishlegs needed.

"No way, you got like Plus Two Strength now." Fishlegs said. I never understood why or even where he draws those numbers from. "The book really give you a potion that did that?" I nodded. "You sure it's not just some really super herbal tea?"

"Yes, I'm pretty sure most tea recipe do not look like molten iron and eat the pot that boiled them," I said. Fishlegs was interested, based on that look he had in his face. I knew he was going to want to take notes on the subject.

"Oh, imagine what if I took that strength potion too," said Fishlegs. That was another good question. Two very interesting Fishlegs questions in one day, maybe I should use him as a sounding board more

often. Still, if one potion could let me, scrawny, weak Hiccup the Useless, easily lift an axe that would have barely been carried with two hands, what would it do to someone who was already plenty strong, like Fishlegs?

So I opened the book and we started reading it together. Fishlegs, like me could only read Norse, but that did not matter so much. Between the two of us, we've found some interesting facts both in the articles and learned more clues about the mystery about this book's origins.

First off, we both noticed that even within the same languages, it became clear that the handwriting tended to vary quite a bit. This made it clear that there were several different authors, making my idea that the book that I was given was compiled from the works of different people seem more and more plausible.

Second, the book was full of various dragon related sorceries. While more mundane knowledge seemed to make up the bulk of the parts we could understand, there was still plenty of strange stuff in the book. It was either dragon related materials were involved, such as the potion, or that the sorcery affected dragons. One notable concoction was called "Icy Breath Mints" which inexplicably made a dragon breath ice instead of fire for a few hours. The book also explicitly stated, "still just as lethal as normal fire breath". Maybe if we could get some dragons who would like to help, we can use this to help put out fires.

Fishlegs took notes out of everything I shared with him. I also shared with him the recipe for the strength potion and for my plan on how I was going to down a Night Fury. I elaborated on both of these subjects. The strength potion recipe included directions of preparing the cooking pot and that the twins kept the hardest to find ingredient in a pickling jar.

Fishlegs looked at me like I had gone irrecoverably insane. Which when "You mean to tell me that you gave the twin your bola launcher?"

"It can't be worse than when I had it," I said. "And it's broken, the twins cannot possibly reassemble it all on their own."

"I guess you're right." Fishlegs admitted. "So how are you going to down a Night Fury, I know you brought a crossbow and all, but that doesn't seem like it is enough." A good crossbow was a solid weapon against even the most heavily armored Vikings, but a poor weapon against dragons. Even the biggest Vikings were small compared to most dragons, on top of being naturally tougher than the average, untrained Norseman villager. These factors, increased mass and general resilience, made it harder for them to bleed out and meant that more damage had to be inflicted to down them. Which was why my bola launcher was not designed for sheer lethality, but rather to disable my target. That was the same philosophy I planned on using. My weapon and means of doing it were different, but overall, the idea was the same.

"This is how," I smiled and pulled out a small case from my pack. "All I need to do is make one successful hit." I opened it, revealing a small set of five crossbow bolts, each with a silver tip and a single rune carved into their wooden shafts. I spent much of the

night before I left Berk making these, hiding them behind the excuse I needed to make ammunition for my weapons. I found the recipe near the end of the book. The bolts were specially designed and crafted to knock a dragon out of the sky, disable its fire breath, and effectively paralyze them. And only on dragons. But once the bolts were fired, they were going to lose their special effect, essentially destroying themselves after use. All I had to do was hit my target, which I was confident in. Given that my potion worked, I had no reason to doubt this plan would fail. I did not fully understand how it all worked, but if it did, I was going to study it more and see if I could make any improvements and improvisations.

"Your dad is going to want to see this book," Fishlegs said. "It's practically the Book of Dragons, Second Edition."_

"Yeah," I said. "Once we down the Night Fury, I'm going to show dad some of what I learned." And who knew, maybe if he approved of me enough, I could probably study the book further. Maybe even go to Rome so I can learn how to read Latin or be allowed to go Questing for a way to decode that mysterious third language.

It was at that point, I found myself regretting that I did not take the opportunity to sleep on the ride to Fort Sinister. Fishlegs and I heard screaming and shouting accomaniepied the sounds of chaos and destruction. The raid had come. Which was perfect, as it meant I would not have to wait long to go home a hero. I sighed, Fishlegs looked terrified and tried to hide under the covers of his bed. I grabbed my things: book, crossbow, and all. No telling what I needed. "Are you going out there?" Fishlegs shivered as I opened the door. "It's dangerous, you could get yourself killed."

"Fishlegs, I have to do this," I said.

"No, you don't!" he protested.

"But it's the only way I'll be accepted byâ€| everyone." The taller boy frowned and looked at me with mournful eyes.

"Thenâ€|" he struggled to select his words. "Nothing I say is going to stop you will it?" I smiled. It was then, I had Fishlegs, though reluctantly, to watch my back for me.

* * *

><p>I loved flying. I really do. Just not so much I had to fly for several hours uninterrupted. Especially when I had decided to comply with my naturally nocturnal sleeping habits to not take a chance to get one or two extra hours of rest. One Eye flew ahead of the whole Flight, as he was the Flight Commander and thus had to lead the charge. I wondered for a moment how that other Flight Commander, the Terror did that when he was so small. Did he just have his Second lead for him or did he just not need to worry about who lead?<p>

The Nadder who had tried to take my swordfish earlier flew to my left. She too was a Squire like myself, but obviously was not as favored. She did not seem to mind it though as she looked rather pleased with herself. She probably had thoughts of what was ahead and was likely thinking on what kinds of things she was going to do with the prestige she would earn. Probably use it to buy a solid mate, Mating Day was only three months away.

Off in the distance, I could see my mother's Flight flying beside us. We were not close enough to be considered the same Flight, but I knew our destinations were the same. I do not know of the fine details of how the two Flight Commanders were going to be allocating their forces, but I knew of what my targets were.

For some reason, my King has deemed it necessary to destroy those Herd made collections of fallen trees over my normal duty of destroying the Herd spires. Important enough that I was required to destroy those targets before being allowed to engage the Herd properly. _Do I have enough Breath to take them all down? _I asked myself. I never really reached the maximum of how many times I could use my Breath at its full strength. Did I have maybe eight or maybe was it seven I could use?

"You're all in deep anticipation of the Hunt," said One Eye. "As expected as most of you have not had the opportunity to engage in a _proper_ Hunt yet." Did that mean to imply that our normal Hunts for food were somehow improper? Then again, all of our previous Hunts had only been to take food from the Herd. Kills made there were simply accidents most of the time.

"Glory to the Flight," I heard the Nadder beside me say. Not wanting to feel left out, I myself added a shout of cheer.

One Eye, I got the feeling enjoyed listening to us shout excitedly. "Well said my Flight. Rest assured, some of us will be getting their names by sunrise." Now that was a prize I would not mind my King to bestow upon me. Usually, the King bestowed names as part of excellent service as the first reward a particularly loyal servant receives. Typically, Squires received their names upon their rise as a full Knight a year after they sworn into their oaths. Earning a distinction by earning the right to have a name before that point would set me apart from other Knights. I would not be merely a Night Fury, I would be someone important. _Now if only there were valid mates around the Nestâ€¦ _Sometimes being a rare an elusive Night Fury tended to bite me worse than a Terror.

This trip was all going to be worth it and I would go home a hero before long.

I do not how long it was since One Eye spoke last, but we eventually found our way to the island where we would attack. The Herd nesting site looked huge, somewhat larger than the one I had raided the day before. There were plenty of fallen trees used to make makeshift caves for the Flight to burn, but most troubling of all was that the center most part of the nest had been made of stone. Plenty of stone at that. There were the typical defensive spires at key points on the high stone formed _canyons_. Was it some special form of cave? It seemed much too solid and large for me to take down on my own. Even if I had to use all of my Breath upon it.

My mother's Flight broke off farther from us at that point, while we slowly glided our way towards the Hunting Ground. "Dead Wing's Flight will circle around our target. Once she is in position we will launch our attacks simultaneously."

"We will be striking from the sea, while other flight strikes from the land," I breathed in my air and looked at for my targets. There

were plenty of them. Unfortunately for me, as my orders required me to spend time destroying those targets before I was allowed to join in with the rest of the Flight. Hopefully, mother can destroy enough of the towers on her own before I was needed and that some of the Flight would burn down several of those things for me to save my own time.

"Do not care about what you bring back this Hunt, focus solely on destruction this time. Our success this Hunt is determined not by how much we carry with us on our return trip, but by how much damage and destruction we leave. Until dawn's first light, you are to continue fighting. Do not concern yourselves about casualties." Somehow, I got the distinct feeling that One Eye was regretting this. Like there was some hidden sadness this Hunt was bringing him. Maybe one day I could understand it, but that day was not today.

"Are you okay, Night Fury?" said a voice near me. It was that Nadder again. "You seemed lost in thought."

I turned to her. "I am," I said. "I must spend precious time destroying Herd things before I am allowed to join in the slaughter. I might" My senses and guts told me that dawn was at most an hour away and that I had little time to waste.

"Maybe you will get lucky and one of the Herd will come to you so you can kill him," the Nadder said.

I smiled at that thought, but considered it unlikely. I shook my head. Not once has anyone ever been able to take down a Night Fury, not my mother and I had no intention of letting myself getting taken down. "If they could see me, maybe," I said. I changed the topic of the conversation. "Do you have any hopes for how this Hunt will turn out, Nadder?"

I could see the birdlike Kin perform what passed for a grin for her type. "Maybe skewer a Herd, roast one. Not much, but enough to earn a enough distinction to have a name." That was an admirable goal and more or less the as what mine was. "I have not yet decided on what I p-"

Unfortunately for us, our conversation had to be cut short. I could hear the distance sounds of a telltale explosion followed by a cacophony of screams, Herd and Kin alike. I could see a fire building on one of those Herd spires as the structure collapsed in a single hit. That was my mother's doing and it was impressive and awe-inspiring to watch. At that point, One Eye and his Knights made a sharp dive. I followed them, making sure to stay high above the ground. Though I had been trained for the purpose, I was simply not ready to fight a ground battle alongside them at the initial parts of the attack.

"For the King's Glory!" "Herd Shall Die!" I could hear my Kin make different battle cries all at the same time from their roars.

One Eye and his Knights dove after a couple of those wooden caves and began setting them on fire. Herd defenders attacked in return, brandishing their weapons. Some were successful in killing, others were slain in their stead. They Herd made their cries, their meaningless sounds that did not convey language or understanding. They were just beasts after all.

I wasted no time and launched a full use of my Breath at one of my designated targets. The floating tree cave sank underneath the water as the hole I made in it caused water to flood inside. It had no Herd on it from what I could tell, but all the same, I was one step closer to before I would be allowed to pursue my own Glory.

Other Kin joined me, apparently using my example as an excuse to cause destruction and mayhem for no reason other than it looked impressive. They set fire to some of those tree caves as they swept over them. I barked out my thanks and looked to continue my work.

* * *

><p>Author's Notes:

Funny thing, I consider this and the next chapter still actually be part of a prologue of sorts. This is because for some reason I really want to set up the stage in a logical manner, yet I did not want to skip the filler details due to me being OCD. As a result, no major Transformation stuff happens, but the set up to do these is now available. Which you will see glimpses for sure next chapter.

Good dialogue was really hard to write for so this Chapter I tried to make better use and practice out of multicharacter conversations. As a result of these though this chapter has less dialogue.

Hiccup's opening in this chapter is an echo of how he was when he was searching for Toothless, except the mood is inverted.

If anyone has been confused about the Night Fury Squire scenes, yes that is "Toothless's" point of view.

Also, anyone remember that scene where Toothless gave Hiccup some half-eaten fish as a sign of friendship and trust? Well, I imagined how that would work in dragon society, en masse. Obviously dragons do not share the same fears about cleanliness we do.

**Having made the Red Death into a more King of Dragons and not a mind controller has ended up rather interestingâ€| **

Anyone ever thought about Astrid meeting Camicazi? I've always thought it would be a funny moment considering one was seemingly based on the other. As a result of how I understand them, they would invariably end up being rivals because of extreme competitiveness.

Also, yeah, the Berserker Tribe isâ€| yeah. Really suffering for this. No other way to put it.

3. Chapter 3

**Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

**Please remember to review and provide constructive criticism.
**

Updated the summary to reflect a better understanding of where I want this fic to go.

I did however enjoy writing this chapter very much and so hope that I touched a bit more into the spirit of the franchise.

Also, I think this chapter is where the story starts to pick up steam, but I will warn you, things might be a littleâ€¦ grimmer than I had originally anticipated. This is not typical for the rest of the fic, but is highlighted for this part.

This Toothless is fun to write, I mean, wow. You'll see what I mean when you get to his snippets. Although, I think I might finally be getting the hang of trying to write someone who does not know the terms we humans take for granted. Or well, human necessities or understanding.

I do hope Astrid and Camicazi's characterizations are well received, I'm trying to draw on from what I can to portray them better.

* * *

><p>The 'contest' between Camicazi and me dragged on for I do not know how long. After my successes at fending off the Bog Burglar from stealing my axe, we exchanged roles and the thief then had to protect her sword, which I had failed at. And then Ruffnut decided to get more involved once she decided having 'front seats' was not interesting enough.<p>

I had to admit, Camicazi at least somewhat competent of a fighterâ€¦and a thief. She knew her way around a sword and despite her attitude, she at least had the skill to back it up. Unlike every boy in my group. Then again, that might actually have to do with being a Bog Burglar. Seriously, if their greatest ideal is involve stealing, does that mean they steal from each other? How does that all work exactly? Did Bog Burglars engage in an endless cycle of stealing?

I still think I could probably beat her, in a proper fight, but those thoughts were cut short by the sound of destruction and battle cries. "Ooh," said Camicazi, cheerily. "A dragon raid!" With that action she grabbed her sword and danced up to the door. And no, I did not mean she walked, she actually did some sort of dance. It was clear she was excited.

"Hey wait!" I said.

She seemed to take notice that I had said something and turned her head to face me. "Ooh I know," she said. "We should decide the winner of our little conflict by how well we do in the raid!"

Ruffnut to her credit ran out the door before Camicazi could register it. She said something about "mauling on her lower back" as she ran past the Bog Burglar. She had her double-ended spear with her and we both knew she was going to end up fighting.

I thought of that for a moment. On the one hand, I knew I was a strong warrior who had endured the constant sieges upon Berk for my

whole life. Some have called even claimed I was the best in my generation. On the other hand, I knew I was not formally trained in the art of dragon slaying yet, where as I did not know if Camicazi had already went through those classes either. But if I did back out, I'd be admitting to defeat. Plus, trained or not, we were still expected to be warriors to defend our own village. _So what's more important, not dying or not charging in? _ I also realized that everyone else, was eager to try to get their first dragon kill before. I decided that I should at least try to be responsible for everyone else's sake. I did not trust Snotlout or Hiccup to not make a mess of things. "This is not where we should be," I drawled. Camicazi just grinned. I followed her out the door.

As I expected, we were not the only ones to go out as soon as the raid started. In fact, it seemed as though everyone of us had decided at the same time to go out and receive a fiery death. There did not seem to be any adults or other warriors where nearby, leaving us in relative privacy.

"Ooh," Camicazi said. "Look at that, these boys all want a piece of the action." She got out of the door and into the hallway.

"Darn right," said Snotlout. The boy pounded his fists together. "I'm going to take down that Night Fury and prove once and for all, I am the greatest Viking warrior that ever lived." We all stared at him, especially Hiccup. The Night Fury was the greatest prize any of us could hope to slay. Downing it had been in many of all our dreams and aspirations at least one time. When I was much younger, I dreamed of being able to throw my axe just high enough to decapitate the beast mid flight. Of course, such dreams stopped happening once I started competing in the Thawfest games.

"When you get horribly burned alive, can we have your stuff?" said Tuffnut. Some friend he was. Snotlout understandably ignored him, or was simply too prideful to notice. I would lying if some part of me did not want to see Snotlout get burned, just a little. Maybe drop his ego down a few notches.

"Snotlout," Hiccup said. Out of all of us, I believed Hiccup was the one who wanted to kill that dragon the most. I understood a little of why he wanted to slay it, but I did not understand why he believed that killing it would change the fact he was the worst Viking on Berk. "You _can't_ take down the Night Fury."

"And why not?" said Snotlout. "A wimp like _you_ going to stop me?"

Hiccup pointed at the weapon attached to his cousin's waist, one of Snotlout's many bludgeons. "You're going to try to kill a dragon known for high speed attacks, high altitude flights, and long range tower destroying attacks with a short range melee weapon that is poorly suited to throwing? Not even _I_ am that crazy." I had to admit that was a good argument. I suppose having spend years making up hair brained plots to try to take that dragon gave the runt some idea of how to approach the problem of slaying it.

"Oh, so how are you going to take down the Night Fury?" Snotlout said.

"With this," Hiccup pointed to the weapon strapped to his back. The

crossbow that he had spent all of yesterday fine tuning. Crossbows like it were not uncommon in the Barbaric Archipelago, but they were a poorly suited dragon slaying weapon. At best, it could shoot the wings or tails off to force a dragon to land, but otherwise, most dragons were simply too big to be hindered by one.

Snotlout immediately tried to grab the crossbow from Hiccup's back to examine it. I stopped him by slamming his foot with the butt of my axe. "Hey, get your own weapon, Snotlout," Hiccup said. On reflex, I saw chief's son perform a jab at the stronger boy. I was not expecting Snotlout to tumble back into the arms of Fishlegs, gripping his nose. Hiccup shook his left fist from the pain of the recoil.

"Hey," Snotlout protested. "You punched me!" The boy then removed his hand from his face to see a smear of blood. There was also a small drip of the red liquid sliding down his left nostril. I was surprised, I never knew Hiccup had a good enough left hook to beat a larger, more athletic youth. _Maybe he wasn't so weak after all. _Then again, might have been a fluke.

Hiccup looked surprised and tried to back away. "Uh sorry!"

"You're gonna to pay for that!" Snotlout lifted the smaller boy into the air and threatened to punch him with his freehand. That was when I noticed that everyone else had not been participating in the conversation. I turned and say what they were seeing.

"Put him down, Snotlout," I intervened.

"This isn't over." Snout dropped Hiccup to the ground, hard on his back. The smaller teenager, apparently used to this happening, got up quickly.

"Thanks," the boy grunted. Hiccup really should not have thrown that punch. I only saved him because I did not want to be blamed for Snotlout's misconduct. That and maybe he might actually have some use in the upcoming fightâ€| assuming that punch was not a fluke.

"Look at this!" Then, I showed them what had been distracting the others while they had their little 'argument'.

Everyone had apparently been looking out at some windows and seen the raid. Hiccup and Snotlout just stared, a dumb struck expression on their faces. There was fire, a lot of it. Sure, we expected there to be some, but not a torrent so large that it threatened to engulf a whole settlement. Before us we could two _walls _of flame slowly eating their way through houses and buildings like it was the boar SÃ|hrÃ-mnir being offered up for a feast in Valhalla. And we were right in the middle of this.

"It's so beautiful," said Tuffnut.

"And so dangerous," Ruffnut completed. I could almost swear the twins were crying at the sight of it, but held it back. For what reason, I did not know. But I suspect that even they might have drawn the line at this.

"Our chances of surviving have gone downâ€| by a lot," Fishlegs said. He obviously did not want to be in the firefight and shivered with

anticipation. At that point, we could hear the Night Fury take down another tower. Fishlegs just curled up into a ball and tried to hide under the window sill. "We're all going to die, we're all going to die," he kept repeating until I slapped him out of it, mostly for my own benefit. "Uh, thanks."

"No problem," I said. Unlike everyone else, he was probably the only one who actually understood the danger.

Snotlout was just too awestruck to even make a reaction, apparently having forgotten all about Hiccup.

Another sound of a Night Fury's cry echoed through the battlefield. Hiccup drew out one of his spyglasses and began looking. After he apparently found what he wanted, he began walking down the hallway. "Where are you going?" I called out to him.

"To kill the Night Fury by the Southside," He said. "It's closer than the other one on the North."

"Wait two?" There were two Night Furies now? One was bad enough, having enough power to level buildings in a single blast, but that wasn't important as important as the fact he was going out to fight one of them in the first place. He was going out there in a warzone all in an attempt to kill one of those things. And given the kind of fire we were seeing, he'd likely get killed in the attempt. Useless Viking or not, he did not deserve to die flat out because of such a stupid plan. "You can't really be serious. You going out there, you'll get yourself killed."

Camicazi interjected herself. "Ooh, Astrid, we should totally go with him, it'd be exciting." She was not helping.

Hiccup sighed and turned back to me. "Astrid, I need to do this." He was clearly insane. "And yes, I know you think I am insane for doing this." At least he knew it. "But this is the only way I could get any of you to respect me." He stopped and I approached him slowly.

"What?" I looked at the boy incredulously. "So you think trying to get yourself killed over a dragon is going to get you respect?"

"Yes," I heard the boy say. "I'd get more respect if I died failing to take down a Night Fury than everything else I have ever done."

I sighed. This issue clearly meant so much more to him than I realized. I had to stop him from getting himself killed. I could easily take down the scrawny boy and tying him up so he wouldn't hurt himself. Then, maybe I could go ask Stoic to get him kicked out of the class for his own good. The problem was that it would not stop him from continuing his attempts. I needed to beat out these stupid ideas right out of him. "You're not meant to be a warrior, Hiccup. You shouldn't even be trying to do this. Every time you tried ended in disaster."

I saw him frown. I was fine beating people up physically, those hurts healed quickly and did not end up causing any lasting damage. Attacking them emotionally however, was something I felt a little wrong to be doing. But if it was the only way I could stop him from

getting killed, then I'd do it. I had to be responsible. "Astrid," he said in a soft tone. "Do you respect me at all?"

"No, I don't." I said. It was true. About the only thing I trusted him to do was to fix my axe on those hard days of practice and even then I didn't trust unless I was watching him. I could tell he was looking rather depressed, so I lowered my voice down when I continued. I hated myself for saying those words, but they had to be said.

"You're probably right," Hiccup said.

"Hiccup every time you tried, someone got hurt," I said. He was lucky that yesterday's attempt only ended with a positive note. Gobber said that he was partly responsible for naming her Magnus.

"All my life," Hiccup said. "I just wanted to be like you. One of you guys." Which was why Hiccup made all of his machines. He couldn't throw a bola, so he designs something to throw it for him. Can't chop firewood, he tries to make a device to cut it for him. The list of things Hiccup had invented to make up for his weakness is staggeringly long; the list of successful inventions is countable without hands.

"But you can't," I said. "You're not a dragon fighting Viking, you're a probably better off stuck making bread or on small home repair. I know you want to be a fighter, but that just isn't you."

"But fighting dragons is all that matters around here, anywhere in the Barbaric Archipelago," he protested. He was going to make this difficult wasn't he? "How am I supposed to get you or dad to like me a little more if I can't fight dragons?"

"You can stop trying to be something you're not," I admitted. "Do something else like devoting all of your time to blacksmithing, that's always a good job." Honestly, if I could get him into a less dangerous goal, I could probably begin to respect him a bit more. Some of his ideas that I did see him try were actually quite clever, but typically ended up in disaster. Such as this one time he tried to make a flaming sword. Maybe he'd have better luck if he did not insist on making his test runs every time there was a raid.

I saw him think on my words for a moment. His eyes were closed and I could see him trying to respond. "I want one more chance," he said.

"What?" He couldn't be serious. He still wants to try.

"I want to try one last time," he said. "I need to know if my preparations this time might have done anything."

"Alone?" I said. "All of your previous dragon killing plans ended up in disaster."

"It's a good thing I am not the one who made I came up with it then." he said. What did he mean by that? Did someone else give him ideas? "Astrid, if I fail this time, I swear I'll give up chasing it. I'll even talk to my dad to get out of dragon training. But only if you'd help me." He was sincere I knew him well enough to know that. This was what I wanted have happen.

I just did not expect him to add a stipulation. "Why me?"

"Plenty of reasonsâ€¦" he admitted. "I don't think I can make it to the night Fury without help, those firewalls are too big. That and I need someone to back me up in the event I do down the Night Fury. Lots of people are going to want to claim it as theirs."

So that was my choice now. I help Hiccup now and hopefully if he survived, he would be give up his little crusade once he failed. If I do not, he will continue on as if this conversation never happened. One option gives me a permanent solution for danger on my behalf, the other was safer for me to do, but had increased risks for Stoic's son on both the long and short term. As I never shied away from danger, the choice was obvious to make. Chief Stoic would probably silently thank me if I put an end to his hunting career before he got himself killed.

But some other part of me wonder of a moreâ€¦ surreal result. That he does down the beast. The kill of a Monstrous Nightmare, even if done as a group effort was still a significant boon of prestige even when the credit was split evenly. While I normally am not desperate for that kind of recognition, I would be lying if I said that I wasn't completely interested in downing the Night Fury for the prestige it would bring me. Overall, I had more to gain by joining Hiccup than I did not. "Deal." I saw the boy smile a bit. Maybe this plan would be good and all.

"Count me in, too," said Camicazi. I had been wondering where she had been. Maybe the conversation between me and the useless Viking had bored the girlâ€¦ or maybe she had enough sense not to intrude. I would like to think the latter is what happened.

"Where is everyone?" Hiccup said. I turned my back and saw that aside from Fishlegs and Camicazi were the only others with us.

"Once you started yaking, Thuggory said he'd be taking the Northside Night Fury," Camicazi stated.

"Then, well, Snotlout and the twins went after him," added Fishlegs. "I think he was hoping that would happen." I had only seen Thuggory today and I had to admit. He was older by only a year, but I had the feeling he was a bit smarter than what you normally expected in a Tribal Heir. He probably wanted to give Hiccup his own private hunting trip.

"Well, we can't stay here." Hiccup marched towards the end of the hallway.

"Yes, we can! It's not hard." Fishlegs said as he went after his friend.

* * *

><p>As far as 'Last Chances' went, this was by far the best I'd ever have. I had managed to get not only Fishlegs into aiding me, but also Astrid and Camicazi. Fishlegs despite his cowardly demeanor was without a doubt the strongest teenager on Berk and probably the only one who is as learned as I was. Camicazi was a good swordfighter and a cunning thief, though admittedly I had no idea how the later might

help us. And I do not think I need to judge Astrid.<p>

Granted, if I failed this time, I wouldn't be getting a next time. I promised Astrid and I try my best to stick with them, even if they were things I did not like. Even with the fact I could raise an axe the right way now, I knew I needed as much help as I could get. Stronger and smarter Vikings than me have tried and failed to capture or kill a Night Fury.

If I failed now, having the resources and allies I had, I likely did not deserve to have another attempt anyways. I've been trying to down a Night Fury ever since I turned ten years of age, one way or another, I knew would have to stop eventually, either being a victorious Viking or moving on to other activities.

I silently added a mental note to give Thuggory something in addition to the favors he owed me. I did not know why the older boy aided me every now and again, even though we were near strangers. _Despite being next-door neighbors island wise._ But often, I felt more liked by him than I did my own father. He had dragged Snotlout away from me off in the opposite direction of his own accord, without so much as needing a prompt. And I knew he did it for my sake since I had accidentally given Snotlout a nose bleed. I will admit, it did feel good for once to finally give him some pay back, even at the cost of being thrown on the ground. Though, I think Snotlout was at least justified for his retaliation this time. I needed to have better control of my own strengthâ€| _Which I never had to think about beforeâ€| ever._ In either case, I did not have to worry about Snotlout or the twins mucking up my chances.

I sighed, the moment I had seen the scene Astrid had showed me, I already had devised a plan of how I was going to go about reaching my goal. The dragons had organized themselves into two 'firewalls', each a perfectly straight line of devastation and destruction fueled by the breath of innumerable dragons. I had not seen them do this before, but I knew of this act. According to the Book of Dragons, creating 'firewalls' was an event when the dragons decided to forgo taking food and go straight to destruction. It happened, very rarely without any discernible pattern to trigger the events to lead up to it. The last time this event happened had a decades ago.

My problem was that I could see that the Night Fury was somewhere beyond the firewalls, wasting its attacks on targets on the shoreline. In order for me to have a clear shot at the dragon, I had to get past the firewall. Soon, sun was rising any minute now. Which is where my plan came inâ€|

"So uh Hiccup," Fishlegs asked, "Why are we at a fish vendor?" He said as he was looking through the various barrels.

"Just some last minute preparations," I countered. "We need a barrel full of striped eels." The store owner was likely out fighting right now. He had a habit of organizing the fish into barrels distinguished by type. I saw a barrel for trout, haddock, and shrimp. Still no sign of eels.

Everyone looked at me as if I had gone crazy, including Camicazi, which must have really said something, but I knew they were trying to hide it.

"Found it!" Cheered the Bog Burglar. I examined her barrel and sure enough, we had struck black and yellow gold. The barrel was tall as I was, making it very, very unlikely I could lift it with even my newfound strength.

"So are we just going to give them food and hope they thank us to not attack us?" Astrid said as she looked into the barrel.

Then I did the unthinkable. I grabbed an eel and started splattering myself in its juices before placing the eel into my shirt. Then I did it again. I earned the looks I received from everyone.

"Is this from the book?" asked Fishlegs. I nodded. That earned him looks from the girls. I splattered the boy with an eel.

"What book?" Astrid said.

"Oh nothing," I lied, partially. "Just a book full of dragony things. Like some eels being a common dragon allergen." I told them that it was a dragon related book. They did not need to know that I had an unnamed book full of dragon related knowledge, mundane and arcane.

"That's not all it is isn't it?" Astrid apparently knew when I was lying, even when I was telling the partial truth. Maybe it was my face. It was easier to lie to my dad. So I did the only sane thing a boy in my circumstances would. I hit Astrid with the eel I had and ducked behind a table. "Hey!" She pulled the eel off her face and examined it.

"Just put it on Astrid," I said, "This will repel dragons, hopefully."

"Hopefully?" added Fishlegs. "You do realize they might just decide to fry us to get rid of the stench?" I had not thought of that. If they hated us bad enough, they might decide to focus their attentions exclusively on us. I turned back to the barrel of stripped eels. Time for Plan B.

"Carry it, Fishlegs," I pointed at the barrel. "We're going to need it."

The whole point of the eel I threw to Astrid was to distract her, to get her focused at the task at hand or on crushing me like a fly and not thinking about the book I had brought up. Sure enough it seemed to be working as Astrid, unexpectedly, shoved an eel in my mouth.

"That's payback!" she laughed, something she rarely did due her duties as a shield maiden. It was sweet. I decided I liked the sound of her laughing. What was not sweet was the eel. Usually at the hands of Snotlout, I had more than my fair share of raw seafood entering my mouth. Usually, though it was slimy and wet. It was not supposed to set my mouth on fire and stop my breathing. I spat the fish out and coughed. "Oh sorry," Astrid said, "I didn't think you were allergic."

"Neither did I," I wheezed. My throat was returning to normal, but I did not understand what caused me to react like that. I had raw stripped eel inserted in my mouth before, but never had I reaction

like that. Maybe I was starting to develop something?

"Oof, this is heavier than I thought it would be," Fishlegs retorted as he tried to lift the eel barrel. I knew Fishlegs was the strongest of our class, mostly due to his size. His problem was though he tended to not know how to use that strength in a fight.

At that moment, Camicazi's head poked out from the soup of apparently poisonous to dragon stripped eels. "Is that supposed to be a crack about my weight?" she spat angrily.

"What?" Fishlegs said in a panic. "No, it's not, I swear-" Camicazi got out of the barrel, while Fishlegs was still carrying it. The large boy did not so much as breathe as the Bog Burglar leapt out of the barrel and onto the ground.

"What were you doing there?" Astrid said. I had the same question in my mind.

"Oh, just being extra prepared. I want to repel as much dragon as I could, so I decided a little soak would do the trick," the Bog Burglar replied. "Besides, I heard fish oils were good for you."

"I'd say you're being ridiculous, but I started this off by putting eel juice on my face," I muttered.

"So why are we taking a barrel of eels with us again?" Fishlegs said.

"This is our weapon," I gestured to the eels. "I believe we can frighten off the dragons by throwing eels at them." I hoped that it would work that way.

"You want us to fight dragons with sea food?" Astrid said.

I nodded. "It might not be the most glamorous thing in the world, but hey, if it works, we don't get roasted."

She looked exasperated, "The one time I decide to be nice to you, I end up getting bathed in eel juice."

We all laughed at how ridiculous this plan was. I should know, I came up with it.

After that incident at the fish vendor, came the next step. Attempting to break through the firewall would either end with us claiming glory or use meeting a fiery end. In front of us there was a group of Viking warriors, names and allegiances I did not know. They were engaged in a conflict between a group of mixed dragons, mostly Gronckles and Nadders, but there was a single Nightmare amongst them.

"Are you ready?" I asked my companions. Fishlegs was behind me, the eel barrel easily carried without an additional eighty pound Bog Burglar adding to the weight. Astrid and Camicazi were at my left and right respectively, each with a couple of eels stuffed in the places where one would normally expect throwing knives. I myself had a couple of eels stuffed in my shirt and under my fur vest. I did not know why, but the longer I held the eels in my hands, the more I left

unnerved by them. Like I wasâ€¦_afraid_ of carrying them around for some reason. I shoved those thoughts away, they were irrationalâ€¦ or atleast, impractical.

"We look ridiculous," they all said at the same. I figured as much.

"I know." I commented. I had the feeling we would all agree never speak of this unless we were forced to... on pain of death. Then I started running. They all started following me. "Charge!" I yelled. Yes, it was incredibly dorky, but nothing else felt appropriate.

Vikings and dragons alike turned to look at the spectacle, apparently so stunned to forget they were supposed to be fighting for a brief moment. Eels were flung into the air at an astounding rate. The ones we kept on our my throws, I noticed, were not as pathetic as they had once been. Dragons flew away at the stench and retreated into the sky. The last to least was the Nightmare, which I had noticed had only one eye. I had the feeling he was staring at me intently. The Vikings were in a stunned silence at the scene, quite confused at what was happening. I knew I would be.

"We did it!" Fishlegs cried, still managing to maintain a full sprint while carrying a bucket still partially filled with eels.

"Yeah!" Camicazi said. "Not a single singe or scratch on me."

"Okay, I had to admit, that turn out better than I expected." That was Astrid.

It feltâ€¦ good for once to have a plan work as I had intended. The moment eels were added into the equation, those dragons turned tail and ran. Everything went smoother than even I had expected, almostâ€¦ too smooth.

Then I realized that dawn was coming, which explained why they ran so easily. Dragon raids never lasted past dawn, might have been a predatory instinct. They simply didn't need to continue fighting when it was nearly time to go anyways. I had just provided them with an easy excuse to leave.

I ran faster, drawing my crossbow out. I leapt over the charred body that was too ruined for me to tell who it belonged to, but I assumed it was human. The old Hiccup would never have been able to do that. "Hiccup!" someone behind me cried, the voice becoming more distant as I went. I had to hurry, before the Night Fury escaped as well.

Sure enough, the beast was still here, making a dive at a boat and delivering a death blow. The sky was still black, but the faint glow of sunlight was soon peeking over the horizon. The light was not bright enough to provide clear vision, yet, despite that, I could clearly see the creature's silhouette against the skyâ€¦ It did not matter.

I shot the beast as soon as the boat exploded into a thousand parts.

* * *

><p>I had wasted far too much time. My Kin, though initially willing to aid me in sinking the Herd's water wood caves, turned their attention to more immediate and glory fulfilling matters. The majority had been reduced to ash by the initial wave of fiery bombardment by Gronckle lava, but those that remained were still my charge. Meanwhile, I was left on my own to destroy these things. Worse yet, the Herd evacuated the moment the Hunt began and provided me with no opportunity to gain recognition without breaking the King's laws. I was never going to earn a kill at this rate<p>

Dawn was coming soon and I still had several things I needed to destroy. I had to spend some time resting so that I could recover some of my breath, but I felt I was at my limit. I decided it was best I left as soon as I destroyed this last one. As soon I did, I had noticed, one of the Herd that had a strange, thing pointed at me. It surprised me as the Herd had run en mass from the shore to better defend their nest. It did something and soon, I felt a pain enter into my belly. A small object of some sort penetrated my scales and wounded me.

For something so small, it hurt far more than it should have. And the pain was spreading everywhere throughout my body and it grew worse. My wings felt stiff and I plummeted to the ground like a falling stone. I crashed into one of those vines that the Herd fancied in many of their tree dwellings before hitting the dirt. The sudden impact and the twisting of my body had entangled me in the vines, preventing me from taking any movement. I wanted to burn myself free, but my stomach and heart had felt as though they were made of stone.

I saw the Herd that shot me approach me from the side, wielding an axe, I believe that's what my mother called it, in its hand. He looked far smaller than more of the Herd I had seen before, maybe he a juvenile? Behind him were three others, all of them approaching slowly weapons drawn, all of them with yellow fur atop their heads. The large one in particular, looked like he could crush my windpipe with his bare hands.

I was scared. All of them reeked of death, their stench made me cringe. I wish I could move my legs so that I might have a chance to survive. All I could do was look to see that my captors were slowly making their taunts and meaningless sounds. I could see my Flight overhead retreating in droves from the sun's coming light. They were abandoning me to die.

The Herd that shot me, the smallest and the only one with brown fur approached me, the axe hung lazily. I could see the means that brought me down stored upon its back. He made roars and repeated sounds and taunts near me.

When I was a fledgling, I heard stories about this time, memories from older and more experienced Kin having watched their mates and loved ones suffer cruel ends at the paws of the Herd. The Herd always went for the kill; me being unable to use my Breath and my claws to break my bonds and my enemies just made me easier to slay. Now I was about to experience those accounts first hands and I would not survive to tell the tale. _I wonder, what awaits me after this?_

I was going to be brave about, I decided. I looked my attacker in the eyes and waited for the end. I could see its eyes. And I thought

for a moment that he could see my fear. Maybe the Herd enjoyed it, watching one of the Kin's last moments to be filled with fear. I closed my eyes. I was not brave enough to see my own end. Nothing was happening, except for that my attacker and his compatriots were making those sounds again. For a moment, I thought that they were arguing amongst themselves. But that can't be right can it? Beasts like the Herd do not speak.

Before long, I heard the vines being cut one by one. The bindings that held me were growing weaker and weaker with each snap. I took my chances and as soon as I had enough freedom to move, I leapt up and pinned down the Herd that had shot me. My right claw dug into its shoulder a little, drawing some blood. My paws were bigger than his whole neck, and I could snap it with little effort. I could hear its companions gasp in shock, their weapons were drawn, but they did not want to risk slaying their leader. A small trickle of blood from the wound I received dripped onto the creature's chest.

I locked his eyes with mine again. He was at my mercy. I saw his eyes and saw he too was afraid to die. It unnerved me to see that fear. Why, I did not know, but it felt wrong. I did not want to see it any longer. If I killed it, I would not have to see the look of fear in his eyes again.

Then, I realized that this creature had released me from my bonds, even though it was the one that placed me there. Which made this whole thing even more uncomfortable. For what purpose? I did not know. Surely even the dumbest of animals could realize letting your prey escape was a bad idea, especially when that prey was the Kin. But regardless, I realized that by releasing me, it had set up an obligation for me. Even though it was a lowly beast, I could not kill it. Honor dictated that I had to return the favor. _Even though its head would make a fine offering to my Lord. _I just had to hope its compatriots would not strike me down once their admittedly small leader was out of the way.

I decided the best thing to do then was to scare them and hope they were frightened enough to not pursue me. I let my hold on the creature's neck down and delivered a terrifying shout. "Go away!" Hopefully it could just understand the loudness, though I doubted it was that intelligent. The creature looked stiff as a tree and I turned and quickly made a run for it. The Herd then attempted to comfort their fallen master and did not bother to deal with me. I was free to go it seemed. I jumped up and flew away.

At least, that had been my whole goal. My wings did not function and I promptly plummeted down on the ground face first. Instead of soft dirt however, I had the misfortune to pummel my skull against the Herd cut up trees. The wood split in two in several places and my face felt uncomfortably broken.

Of course, getting a concussion was the least of my worries. The pain that had downed me earlier came back in full force. My body ached in every place, especially in my bones. It was like I was being set on fire, from the inside out and I saw that I was actually on fire. Specifically, green fire, like I had suddenly become a Nightmare for a second, but had not been granted protection from the self-immolation. I collapsed on the ground shortly afterward, my body, felt weary and ravaged. And that made me still vulnerable to the Herd should they decide to slay me.

"Okay, that was weird" I heard a voice say. "Are dragons supposed to do that?"

A blinked, a little hope had been rekindled. The voice's source, I was uncertain of, but I felt that it was my Kin who had come to save me. Though, I did not understand what the word "dragon" meant or the confusion shown by the voice. Maybe it was one of my Kin thinking that I had been willingly spared was an oddity. Then I realized that the voice came from behind me. I turned and looked.

"Hiccup," one of the yellow fur headed ones said. "Dragons do not turn intoâ€¦ Norsemen."

The one addressed as 'Hiccup', the one that had shot me and I had just spared, replied, "Butâ€¦ how much do we know really know about dragons, Astrid? This might be completely normal for all we know." Then there was an argument I had a hard time trying to follow. I gathered from that 'dragon' they were referring to me. The other term 'Norsemen' was still unfamiliar, but I figured I might get a better grasp of it later. None of this made sense though, why was I suddenly understanding the sounds the Herd made. They were just common animals, not capable of speech or reasoning.

Then I had a sinking feeling enter my gut. I saw that my paw was a disturbing shade of pink. My paw was abnormallyâ€¦ small, frail looking. The claws had become dull and useless for scratching or digging. The scales were too soft, and seemed far less durable than they were. I checked other parts of my body, frantically searching for answers. I was missing my tail, I had grown fur. The wound I had taken earlier had seemingly vanished, along with whatever it was that had injured me. "H-how isâ€¦" I gasped. My voice wasâ€¦ different. It was my own words, I understood them, but it seemed soâ€¦ alien. The reason I could understand the Herd, was because I had become one of them.

Then, the argument between the ones who had been referred to as 'Hiccup' and 'Astrid' came to an abrupt end. Because in the blink of an eye, the other yellow furred one was suddenly wrapped around by vines.

* * *

><p>It does not take a genius to notice when a 'Thing' is being called and for what reason. It does not take a genius to notice that dragon raids have increased or that there were now two Night Furies. It does however, take a genius to know a perfect opportunity when he sees one. Now, I could have easily raided the Tribes that so foolishly left skeleton crews to guard their islands with my whole fleet, but I was after a bigger prize. Or should I say, smaller?<p>

"Filthy Outcasts!" The entangled girl shouted. "Let me go so I fight you like the little girls you are!" The Bog Burglar Heir, though a master escapist in a society of thieves, was clearly the most valuable possession of the infamous Bertha the Big. Same went with every Heir in fact. Now, if I had simply just raided from every Tribe, they would have just went on with their lives and I'd simply have whatever it is I stoleâ€¦ but I grab the heirs, I'd have them and more.

All I had to do was simple, wait for the dragons to incinerate half of Fort Sinister then swoop in and take their Heirs amidst the chaos. Failing that, well, use that time to gather information about the shattered defenses and scatter spies for future use.

"It's Alvin the Treacherous!" Shouted the large blond boy. He must have been Thuggory, I heard about him. Meathead Heir and a tough young man, or so I heard. Apparently his reputation had been exaggerated as he broke out into a loud scream. "Run for your lives!" It did not save him as he had been entangled by two bolas. "Or notâ€" Two dozen of my men, with assorted weapons, marched and surrounded the Heirs before they could run away. They were trapped and all that was left to do was to subdue them. From what I could see, there were no other Vikings who even notice that we were here. There was no escape for them.

"In the flesh," I said. Everything was going according to plan and there was nothing that could be done to stop me.

"What do you want?" That was Stoic's disappointment. I knew the stories of his supposed 'uselessness', but I knew his daddy well enough to know he had a soft spot for the body. He was the most useful of the lot, for I bet he would have the highest ransom. And if not, well, I heard he made some rather interesting inventions. And if that does not work, well, I had other uses.

"Isn't it obvious?" I pointed at them. "You lot and the Night Fury." The only reason I had found these runts was because I had seen an unidentified shape plummeting to the ground. The sound of its roar and its fire however made it plainly clear to me what it was. Would have been a foolish of me to pass up the opportunity to kill the actual heroes and pass off the deed as my own accomplishment. Even I had to worry about things such as reputation. "Now you lot can come peacably or I can capture you the hard and painful way, which will it be?" Their faces told me 'no'. It didn't matter.

"It's gone, Alvin," said Stoic's boy, "It's not here."

"Pity then," I commented, "I was looking forward to mounting its head above my fireplace." I looked down and sawâ€" a naked boy looking at me with fear in his eyes. He was around the same age as the rest of the heirs and had dark hair that was all matted in an odd fashion. "Now who is this?" He must have been Dagurâ€" I heard the other Heirs did not like him much, so I assume this must have been some idea of a prank. Or he might have lost his clothes in a fire.

"He's no one important," said Hiccup. "Just leave him be." The girl who resembled the Bog Burglar Heir gave him a stern look. I did not understand the implication, but that meant that the boy was someone important. Andâ€" someone who was not Dagur. It might have been important anyways, safe to keep him locked up along with the others.

Then, the Bog Burglar looking girl threw her axe at me. "Will you look at that! I knew I could always use a new axe." Unfortunately for her, I easily grabbed the axe and strapped it to my belt. "Trying to kill Alvin the Treacherous? Ooh hoo! You're not as smart as you look," I taunted her. The look on her face was just priceless. I must have taken something very valuable of her's.

As if on cue a net came up over her, ensnaring and entangling her. Apparently we ran out of bolas. Now all that was left were the naked boy and Stoic's disappointment. I had meant for this all to take a short incident, but I couldn't resist dragging this out. Especially since no Vikings had come searching for us yet. I loved the uncertain fear on their faces as I slowly let them suffer a bit more.

Then, I had seen the unclothed boy trying to crawl his way out unnoticed. Obviously it failed. "Well, will you look at that? Poor kid thinks he can get away," I punished him for his attempt by kicking him in the face. He bled. A few teeth even came flying out of his mouth. I knelt down and picked up the discarded teeth and just relished in the moment of it. "Hey look, I think I found myself a new souvenir." My men laughed alongside me. I had expected him to make a retaliation or a war cry, but it appeared that I had knocked him out. Just as well, it was probably time to leave anyways. "Knock them out and take them."

The children gave screams of protest as the my men used various tricks till they would pass out. Typically, hitting them on the head until they fell unconscious. About the only one left was Stoic's runt who had tried to run as he had understandably not been entangled by a net or bolas. So for him, I decided the simplest means was to grab his puny neck. His struggling was pointless, though I had to admit, he was more of a hassle than I had anticipated. No matter, I had to hit his head three times before he dropped unconscious. Then I stole his bag and I threw him on the ground, where two of my men then set out to carry him into the ship's hold.

I grinned, now that everyone on my capture list was out cold. It was time to check the spoils. For some reason, the kids had a barrel full of stripped eels with them. Could easily serve as food for my crew and my hostages, so that was taken. Obviously the weapons held by the children would be put to better use in Outcast hands. In particular, the axe of that shield maiden would make a nice partner for my own personal one. Plus the steel and wood crossbow would be an excellent for me.

But what was most interesting was what Stoic's lad had with him in his backpack. Most Vikings you see, did not value knowledge. In fact, most were adverse to reading as though it were a plague. Not I though. I was a futurist. I saw the boy had an interesting black book upon his possessions. One filled with strange and draconic lore.

I was reading some of the book on the way back to my ship, noting the odd bits of knowledge that were possessed by it. Most of it though was useless to me. I did not want to know about dragons, unless I could use that information for my own ends. Of course then I found an interesting little entry. "Savage," I called for my first mate, probably the only one slightly less incompetent than the rest. "Place an order for deadly nightshade berries. And see if you can cover that boy up, I don't want to see him unclothed on my ship."

* * *

><p>I awoke with my teeth hurting. There wasâ€| something in my mouth, something soft. I spat it out and found a what used to be some sort of sheet of woven white plant stuffs. It was soaked in blood, my blood. Thatâ€| Herd that kicked me in the mouth had done far more

damage to me than I had ever thought possible. I used my new paws to feel the shape of my new mouth and my face. I wish I had a pool of water I could look into, I need to see my face.

I had becomeâ€| covered in furs of some sort, making me feel somewhat warmer. I had always thought the Herd had grown large fur on every portion of their bodies, but it appears I was wrong. I tried to get up and walk on all four of my legs, but the position felt awkward. Then I remembered that the herd instead walked on their hind legs. I tried that instead and felt slightly more comfortable, though it still felt so strange to only need two legs. It all felt soâ€| alien to me. What happened? Why did I become one of the Herd?

When I was done checking myself over, I searched my surroundings. I was completely surrounded by wood, inside one of the Herd's caves, I assumed. Though the space felt so narrow and Near me was a set of bars, made out of that substance that was only found in some Herd made items like axes. Beside me were the Herd that had dispatched me. I felt so small near them. Before I had easily towered over them, now though I had the feeling I was the shortest. The one called 'Astrid' along with the two others who I had not learned of their identities were seated far away from me. Meanwhile 'Hiccup' had appropriately placed near me. Those terms have must have been what they were similar to how Kin referred to each other when one lacked a name. Though 'Hiccup' sounded ridiculous. Aside from that, I could not find anything or anyone else of notice. The Herd that had captured all of us have seen it fit not to leave a guard.

Its features were not as I remembered them being the last time I had seen him. Its left hand was different from his right; the left had started growing claws. The left side of its face hadâ€| changed. A small patch of black scale had formed around the left eye. Which at that moment had slide open and revealed a large lime-green iris that I was familiar only with my mother and my own reflection.

It stirred awake and leapt back at me in reflex as I examined it.

What I was about to do, broke so many different assumptions I had about the Herd and the Kin. I was going to hold a conversation with one, because I needed answers and I hated not knowing. I knew they could talk because of events of the previous night. "You will undo what you have done to me, Herd," I stated flatly. I hated how my voice sounded, but I did not care if it would get me back to my true form as soon as possible. I figured that whatever it was that brought me down, was the likely culprit. I was familiar with strange powers, as that was often the most valued prize the King would give to a loyal subject. Granted, most kept their powers secret from all of the most trusted, so I had only a few stories to go along about what worked like. Though I never thought the Herd access to such things as well.

The Herd blinked at me, trying to understand what I said. "Listenâ€| dragon, I do not know what happenedâ€| that arrow I shot you with, that was supposed to paralyze you, notâ€| turn you into thisâ€|"

"You just gestured to all of me," I stated. That for some reason caused the Herd to give a brief chuckle. I did not understand the joke. My frown was enough to convince him to start laughing. "Alsoâ€|

what is wrong with your hand? And your face?"

As I said that, the Herd had a chance to look up and see that his hand was growing claws and forming black scales. He then frantically felt his own face. "Yeah, that could be bad."

"I just want you to fix this, tell me what has happened to you and me."

"I don't know, the book never said anything about thisâ€¦ then again I didn't have time or the ability to read through it all." Book? That was a new term on me. Admittedly, there were several new things I was learning today.

"What's a book?" I wanted to get this conversation back on topic, but not knowing what he said made this even more infuriating than it should be.

"Uh it's where you put writing in it and use itâ€¦ None of that makes sense to you does it?" It could see the look of confusion on my face. 'Writing' and 'Book' were now being added to the small but ever growing list of things the Herd has words for that I do not understand. "So anywaysâ€¦ Fishlegs." -he pointed to the large blonde furred one- "And I been read- er learning about dragon related stuffâ€¦ Uh you know that you kind are dragons right? Nightmares, Nadders, Gronckles, and so forth?"

"So, you use the term, 'dragon' to refer to my Kin, do you not?" It nodded. Surprisingly the terms of the various Kin were exactly the same as before I had the learn all of these other new terms.

"Okay, so I drank this potion and I shot you with this arrowâ€¦ and now we're like this," It explained. That fascinated me somewhat. Apparently, the Herd had power outside of the King's service. Maybe I should learn more about 'potion', 'book', 'reading', and 'write' when I had the chance. I had never heard of the Herd possessing such capabilities before, but then again I did not never heard of anyone having a conversation with one of the Herd before.

"Can you change us back then?" I asked.

"I do not know, it never came up or at least was not in Norse." My frown made it evident that I did not know what Norse was. "It's a languageâ€¦" Another word I did not knowâ€¦ "It's what we're speaking in right nowâ€¦ We're talking in Norseâ€¦ and you can read Norseâ€¦ speaking of how are you able to speak Norse."

"I don't knowâ€¦" I responded. "This is all too confusing. Neither of us know anything that can get us out of this mess." It nodded.

So we stayed silent for a long moment, thinking of good questions that the other can actually answer. The other Herd were still asleep, not moving and barely breathing. I did not have to like the Hiccup, but I had to be respectful, honorable. I wanted to return to my true self, but I knew that I could only do that if the being that had inflicted this...curse upon me also helped me to remove it. That required cooperation... and trust, as much as I disdained it. After thinking long and hard about whether or not I wanted to bring up this subject, I asked. "Why did you spare me?" I decided not to ask about why he had decided to defend me from capture earlier, at least, for

now.

The Hiccup spent a moment trying to think about how to phrase its answer. "Because I saw that you were scared to die" it said, a solemn tone in its voice. "Is that why you did the same for me?"

"Yes and no. Mostly, I was honor bound to do so." The Hiccup nodded in turn. Admittedly, I did feel, its fear when I nearly decided to slay it, but I was not going to admit to caring about the feelings of another, especially not one of the Herd. Even though we were playing a sort of game. "Why did you go out and shoot me in the first place?"

"I wanted to kill you," it admitted. "So I could offer your heart for my father and bring him glory Sorry about that" I kept my face still, trying to hide my emotions on the subject. That was a chilling thought. The Herd had a concept for glory by slaying as the Flights did. All this time, I had thought that the Herd just did what it did because they were mere beasts simply resisting the Hunt. To realize that the Herd was capable of acting with the context of glory, was somehow unsettling to me in a way that I never thought possible. Especially since I tried to slay the Hiccup for much the same reasons it had to slay me. _But that should not matter, it is just one_ _of the Herd, not one of the Kin_. "So hey, what do I call you." With any luck he did not put my recent thoughts together.

That question was easier and did not likely have any more unsettling truths I would need to learn. "I have always been called the Night Fury by my Nest."

"But you aren't a Night Fury right now" It said.

"It is what I truly am," I protested.

"So you don't have a proper name?" I shook my head at its question.

"I can just remain nameless I believe," I stated.

"Well, you kinda' can't." I looked at it questioningly. "Most everyone has a name" Just when I thought something so innocuous such as asking about names could not get any more unusual.

"What does 'everyone' do to have a name?" I asked. Names were something the King had issued to trusted servants, such as Knights or very productive gatherers. If all Herd had a name, that was an oddity and I wondered for what accomplishment would they have to be deserving of.

"From being born?" It replied. "Or maybe Tribal admission, everyone gets their names when they're just wee babies."

Boring born was enough for Herd to name their offspring? Were they really so prideful and arrogant? "So if everyone has a name what's your's?"

"Uh my full name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third," it said. It was longer than I thought it would be. I suddenly felt so stupid for believing that 'Hiccup' referred to its kind. It was still

a rather silly name. "So yeah, now that you're humanâ€¦ you kinda need to have oneâ€¦ since naming yourself Night Fury might be a bitâ€¦ awkward." I nodded, understanding the logic. I had pieced together that 'human' meant what Herd called themselves, like how they called the Kin as 'dragons'.

"So what do you recommend?" Besides, I only needed to have that name so long as I was bound in this weak body. Once I returned to normal, I could discard it.

"How about 'Toothless'?" Hiccup said.

"Why Toothless? Ohâ€¦" Hiccup was referring to the fact that I had lost teeth due to that large Herd that Kicked me. The one Hiccup said was 'Fishlegs' said that man was named 'Alvin'.

"Think of it asâ€¦ well a name you got because of a notable battle scarâ€¦"

"Like One Eye?" I said. One Eye, my Flight Commander was proud of his name, that much I knew. I had heard he earned the name when he had slain his own Flight Commander ages ago. He was proud of it because it was his finest moment.

"Yeah, exactly like that!" Hiccup said.

On the other hand, I wasn't exactly proud about the fact I had been kicked in the teeth hard enough to lose them. Still, it didn't sound too bad. Plus, it wasn't as though I had to stay 'Toothless' forever right? Afterall, it was better than 'Fishlegs'. "I guess it could workâ€¦ I guess I shall be 'Toothless' then."

* * *

><p>Astrid's characterization isâ€¦ difficult to grasp as her development in the movie makes her into a very different person than she used to be. As a resultâ€¦ me trying to merge both of movie and tv Astrid resulted in the portrayal you ended up seeing her above. Man, I forgot how mean early movie Astrid isâ€¦ Really complex character that one. Trying to balance it, hope you like this.

Dragons in general do not even think humans are even sentientâ€¦ so as you can imagineâ€¦that bleeds heavily into Toothless's PoV

For those of you wondering why Hiccup and Toothless AKA the Night Fury that got shot have ended up transforming different ways. That's because both of them have been turned via different means. Hiccup drank a potion and Toothless had an arrow.

Also originally considered averting the instant communication aspect that is so common in transformation works, but this would just make it next to impossible to tell a good story withoutâ€¦ adding complication. So I settled for what you see above in the Hiccup and Toothless conversation.

And yeah, I intentionally made it so that Toothless does not use male or female pronouns for humans. Mostly due to ignorance.

****Oh and in case you guys have not figured this out yet, this Fic is now officially "Off the Rails." And I bet all of you guys were expecting the Red Death to be the only antagonist in this fic. Nope.****

4. Chapter 4

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****Additional disclaimer, this chapter is full of boatsâ€¦ I have no idea what happened.****

****Please remember to review and provide constructive criticism. ****

****Changing update schedule to go on Weekends. As an apology, this chapter is slightly longer than the previous ones.****

* * *

><p>My name was Toothless. I sat there silently, contemplating my newâ€¦existence. The name may not have been given to me by my King, yet I accepted it from a near complete stranger no less. If I had to rationalize my action, I could say that that one had defeated me in fair combat, thus entitling it the right to do whatever it wanted with me. At least, that's how I would tell any Kin who asked me. No one needed to know that I had simply chosen to have a name because as a human it was simply common practice.

I hated this new body of mine. It was frail and weaker than my old one, not to mention the obvious lack of wings meant that I would never fly while I was in this form. I lacked the ability to use my ears to echolocate and my eyes did not adjust as much as I hoped they would to the darkness. On top of that I feltâ€¦ ill. Like my stomach was being churned in and out. I did not know what was the cause of it, but the illness felt somewhat familiar. "Are you okay?" asked Hiccup.

"Just fine," I lied. It clearly did not believe me.

"I think you might be getting seasick," it said. Its draconic eye scanned me, hopefully figuring out my problem. Hiccup grabbed the object that had been in my mouth only a few minutes prior. "This your first time on a boat?"

"I do not know that word, so assume that it is." I responded. My stomach lurched back and forth. "I assume you mean thisâ€¦ thing we are on."

It nodded, "Yes, we're on what's called a boatâ€¦" So that's what they were called. Now I could stop having to reinvent a new phrase everything one of those boats came up into a discussion with the Kin. "Anyways, what you're experiencing motion sickness from being rocked back and forth, you'll get used to it, eventuallyâ€¦"

"So is it like skysickness?" I said. Skysickness was a common ailment that happened when fledgling Kin first started learning how to fly. It was caused mostly by a fledgling's body still being unused to

moving around on the air currents and updrafts. I, like so many other young Kin, had thrown up breakfast after a swift dive. Unlike other Kin, I had done so on my own mother, but that was many, many moons ago, long before she earned her name or became a Flight Commander. As a result, my punishment had only been having to bathe with her, which at the time I dreaded more than anything else as it meant having to be ridiculed by the other fledglings.

"I don't know, not familiar with that word." Hiccup said. "But maybe." I agreed upon thinking about it, skysickness and seasickness were related in my mind.

I laughed. "Finally, a term I know that you don't." I knew it was petty of me and I really should not have delighted in flaunting it, but having learned of the existence of the seemingly larger Herd, I mean, human, vocabulary, I wanted a chance to be able to upstage it. "So how do I deal with it for now?"

"Well, usually, I just tried to keep my mind on other things, so I guess maybe continuing to talk." it said.

"Then what do we talk about?"

"Boats?" Hiccup suggested.

"I'd rather talk about other things 'potions', 'books', 'reading', and 'writing'. Those things were related to how weâ€| changed." That and because I wanted to know of these strange abilities that the Herd possessed. If they had the power to change me, a proud Night Fury, in toâ€| one of them I needed to be able to know how I might defeat it. Why had I not heard of from any of the Kin possessing such capabilities before?_

"I wish I could, but I think it would be easier to talk about things if I had an example and Alvin having taken all of my things, including all of my books. All we have right now is the boat." I thought about it for a moment. It gave me a perfect opportunity to learn more about these human-made things. I would finally know how these things worked and operated. Might be easier to use boats to transport truly prodigious quantities of food rather than flying. I nodded in response. I've heard tales from my lowly commoners who were sent scouting about the mountains of fish that the Herd could carry on these so called boats. I would present this knowledge to my King on my return and be rewarded handsomely.

"And so we're having a discussion about having a discussionâ€|" I said. Hiccup just gave a chuckle. "Go ahead, I will listen."

"To be honest, I don't know much about boats. I probably would know more if dad had decided to send me to Roman school." This was getting old, 'Roman' was another word did not know. I need to figure out a means of remembering all of these world so I might pester someone for their meanings later. 'School' however, I was familiar with. That implied that among humans there was something of a formal education to be learned, though I suspected that it might have been different from what I had learned. It noticed that. "I'm going to have to start explaining things aren't it? Well, I do know a bit of how boats are built. The boat we're on, like most other Viking longships, is made using a method called 'lapstrake' that means each of the planks is overlaid over the next. In between each plank is animal hair or wool

soaked in pine tar, this keeps the hull, the body of the ship, another word for boat, from taking in water while at sea, thus making it float. You get all that?" I nodded.

"So how does a boat move?"

"Well, sails and oars are needed for the ship to sail. Sails are those large sheets of cloth or fabric you see above the rest of the ship and oars I guess are like the arms coming from the body. Without them, a ship is unable to control its own movement and is at the mercy of the tidesâ€¦" I did not understand what 'cloth' or 'fabric' meant, but having spent all of early morning destroying ships, I knew what he was referring to.

"So is it like a dragon losing its wings or tail fins being unable to fly and being at the mercy of the ground?" I asked.

"Yeah, like that." It replied. Boats were certainly more interesting than I had originally anticipated. I had already surmised that boats were useful, but there was much more to learn about that one subject than I realized.

Hiccup then got up from where it sat, and moved straight over to one of the walls of the ship we were on. That posture to me looked awkward and more like they were falling forward than actual walking. I followed, moving my four legsâ€¦ "Hey, you probably start learning how to walk properly..."

I blinked. "We have four legs, why do you not move with all of them?" Among the Kin only Nadders were the kind to not use four legs to walk and that was only because their wings could not reach the ground. Then I realized that I had only ever seen the Herd move upon their two hind legs.

"Toothless," it used the name it gave me. "Humans only have two legs and two arms. We only use legs for walking and arms for when we need to interact with the world. You have to start learning to use them as a human does or well, people will figure out you're a dragonâ€¦"

I snorted, but I had understood why. I had accepted the name because it was an offering, a gesture of goodwill from the human. It was both a symbol of his trust of me as well as a camouflage. There was a 'kill on sight' order for any Herd that had wandered too close to the Nest and I had reason to suspect that the Herd had similar rules. I had to make my best effort then not to advertise my true existence as a dragon and seem as human as possible. I did not however have to enjoy it. I got up, and stood for the first time in this new body of mine on my two legs. My feet were unsteady and my balance made me feel uncomfortable. "Is this better?"

Hiccup only smiled. I moved forward, using my legs to propel me along side of it. Once I had reached the wall, it grabbed one of my paws and placed it on the wall. It was very smooth and I moved my paw back and forth to feel its texture. I found the hairs and hardened tree sap as Hiccup had described earlier. "I do not know how dragons do things, but humans use their hands for nearly everything they want to touch." It felt oddly comforting doing this, using myâ€¦ hands.

But there was a more important matter that needed to be addressed. The only reason I had become human was because Hiccup had struck me

down and as far as I knew he was the only one who had any means to return me to normal. I realized that I might not be able to forcibly coerce the human to do that and thus I needed to be more respectful.

We stood there for a silent moment, continuing to examine the side of the boat for no real reason other than to take up time. I broke the silence once again. "If you ever learned of a means to change me back into a dragon, would you use it on me?" I had to ask. I needed to know if it would aid me. If it would, then I would do my best to support its efforts in any way that would support that outcome. If not, then I had better find other avenues.

Hiccup hesitated for a moment before giving its answer: "I did thisâ€¦" it said as it held my hand. "I have to do my best to undo itâ€¦ If I find anything, yeah I change you back."

Hiccup's answer was fairâ€¦ and in a way noble. The human knew to take responsibility for its actions and thus would do my best to fix it. Admittedly, most dragons, especially commoners did not really understand how to handle responsibility, though that usually had to do with a lack of education. "You are very honorableâ€¦ for a humanâ€¦" I replied. This caused Hiccup's face to turn slightly redder. I did not know that meant, so "Well, is there any way I could help?"

"Would you be willing to work with my friends?" Hiccup pointed at the still unconscious humans. I was not so certain that they would be as amiable to me Hiccup had been. If they were feeling particularly violent, there was nothing I can do to stop them.

I thought about it for a moment and then decided. "If it will get me out of this mess, I will do it."

"Would you harm them?" Hiccup asked. The reasoning behind the question was obvious. It needed to ensure his allies would not come to harm as a result of my actions.

"No," I said. Silent I added a stipulation, which likely went without saying: provided they do not harm me.

"Promise?" It said. This was getting repetitive.

"On my honor," I exclaimed.

"You have honor?" Hiccup sounded even more skeptical of my words.

"All dragons have honor," I said as a matter-of-factly. This was getting repetitive. _Is he really that much of aâ€¦_ I then realized I may have sounded offensive than I had meant to. "Look, Hiccup, I'll do my best to work alongside your friends you can trust meâ€¦ In fact, maybe we should wake them up now?"

"No, I think we should let them restâ€¦ and I think they might be immediately distrustful of you, since even if they do not remember who you are, they would not have any reason to trust you."

And as if it was planned out, one of them got up and looked around the room. "Seems like one of them has decided to awaken." It then

focused on Hiccup, with a look that I could only describe as an odd mix of fear, anger, and confusion in its eyes. It scanned the room trying to make sense at what had happened and locked eyes with Hiccup's after a few moments. I desperately needed to figure out a way to differentiate their genders. As one of the Kin, I only ever needed to get close enough to smell or look at the coloration and patterning of the scales to tell male from female.

"That's Astrid. Might be a bit upset about this morning..." Hiccup stated. I slowly backed away from him, realizing at what the other human was going to do. It stood up and I went as far away from Hiccup as I could. "Wait, where are you going?"

"I know better than to get involved in a fight that is not mine," I stated. The other human, Astrid, likely was not fully aware of what was happening but the threat of violence in its eyes told me all I needed to know. Given how unused I was to just walking in my new form, I had come to question how effective I would be in a combat situation. At this point, the smart thing to do was to not get involved. "I think I should get back to learning more about boats or practicing at using my hands at any rate."

"Then what about your promise to help me?" Hiccup pleaded as its backed into the wall.

"The promise was to work with your friends," No one was sane would accept that interpretation of my pledge and by the look on its face, I can see that Hiccup was very sane indeed.

"Useless reptileâ€|" At least this time I knew what he was saying.

"That does not apply to me right now." For once, I was glad I was human.

* * *

><p>Sounds stirred me from my sleep. My head hurt, a lot. More so than that one time involving I had a juggling contest with Ruffnut and her brother. My left palm rubbed against my temples. My head was spinning and the world rocked back and forth. The sounds around me were incoherent, leaving me unable to identify what they were. My eyes were blurry and I could barely make out any shapes lit by the dim lights around where I was. How did I get here? I wondered. I could not remember what happened last time I was awake, but I knew that whatever I had forgotten was important.

My head slowly became less clouded and I was starting to puzzle out what had happened. Most everything was brown, given the feel of the floor of which I laid upon, and the constant back and forth motion I felt, I could assume I was on a boat. I tried to look for other things, get more clues, but everything else was too dark or too blurry in my vision to see, all except one thing.

I saw the eye of a creature, one that resembled a cat's eye, but with a green iris that had a slight glow. I knew from somewhere in my memories what it belong to. If I did not act now, it was going to kill me. "Dragon!" I cried. I reached for my axe, but I could not find it. It did not matter, axe or no axe, I was a warrior and I had to defend myself. There was little time for subtly or finesse, I

acted. I leapt up towards the creature my arms flailing. The creature apparently saw this and ducked away before I could have grappled it. But I still had enough time to launch a flurry of punches and kicks to separate parts of its body, which I could only make out the vague outline of. It was awfully small for a dragon, yet not too small that I could think it was a Terror.

I defeated the dragon, it fell down on the ground after only two or three blows. I congratulated myself with a small grin of satisfaction, surviving my first _real_ encounter with a dragon was something that a Viking shield maiden such as myself should be proud of. I then held the smallish dragon by the neck. I was not strong enough to pick it up off the ground but I could hold it there.

Then I heard a chuckling sound and I suddenly realized I should not have been as proud as I had been. I looked down at the creature I had dropped and it in turn looked up at me. "Ow, Astrid," it coughed in a voice I was familiar with. "Why do you feel the need keep beating me senseless?" I rubbed the weariness and drowsiness from my sight and had seen the son of the Chief looking up at me.

"Hiccup?" I said, rubbing the weariness from my eyes. I had a better view of his face now that my eyes had adjusted to the barely lit up conditions. It was deformed somehow. His left eye hadâ€|changed, becoming slightly larger and having changed color and shape since last I had seen it. Additionally, small patches of dark scale had begun to spread from the eye, almost reaching the boy's nose. In my stupor I had mistaken the boy for a dragon. And that was because I could see that he now had a part of a dragon's face now. "What happened to your face?" I asked.

"My face, the nails on my left hand, and given how I uncomfortable my back and my left foot feelâ€| I think parts of my body are randomly becoming more â€|dragony." That last word was something he invented. I noted that Hiccup was oddly calm about the fact that his hand had grown darkened claws and his face had transformed, especially given his current circumstances. I let go of his neck then and there.

His statement still completely did not answer my question. "I mean, how did this happen?" I almost considered giving him another punch or an apology; but I decided that since I had hit him for no reason at all, I would refrain from punching him for the rest of thisâ€| boat ride. _When did we get on a boat, again?_

"Uhâ€| I don't really know either," Hiccup admitted. "I think it might have been a potion I drank."

"What potion?" I was not in the mood to chase him around verbally. I was upset. I eyed him, my voice pretending to threaten violence if he evaded the question again.

"Oh, I got this book that had a variety of dragon stuff in itâ€| It had this potion that promised to make meâ€| stronger, less clumsy, more what people wanted me to be. So I made it and drank before we left Berk." He admitted. "I had no idea that it involved me getting all dragon-likeâ€|" Great, just great. Once again, Hiccup started with what must have been a fantastic idea to that in the end backfired. Only this time, it seemed the boy was the victim of his own mistakes and the consequences could be the worst yet.

"Personally, I think whoever made that potion had the right idea," a new voice said. I turned and looked at the source. It was a boy, around the same age as Hiccup and I, dressed up in old, worn clothes. His hair was a mess, unkempt and uncombed. The new boy was feeling around the hull of the boat we were on, using his hands to examine the spaces between the planks. He seemed familiar, but I could not place my finger on it. "It's much better to be a dragon, one of the Kin," -The usage of the word 'Kin' confused me a bit. Was he really referring to dragons as if they were his own kind?- "even if only in a small part, than it is to be aâ€¦" -he seemed to struggle at choosing the right words- "human. In fact, do you suppose that potion might gradually transform you more into a dragon over time? If it did that, maybe return to my true self, I would down said potion in a heartbeat." _True self? What was he talking about?_

"No one asked you," Hiccup protested to the strange boy. "And yes, I was just thinking that as well. And that maybe the bolts I shot you with would fix my problem." Hiccup shot the boy? Since when? And how would they help him? "I just hopeâ€¦ Well, I don't become more of a dragon than I already amâ€¦" That response caused the strange boy to snort.

Then I remembered the events that happened last time I was awake. It made my head hurt slightly, understanding that I had not just experienced some fleeting dream. I must have been hit on the head harder than I thought. I suddenly felt more than justified for having attacked Hiccup in the past few minutes. It also explained why I saw that there were metal bars that kept us away from half of the ship.

Remembering the morning's events made me realize how foolish I had been in accepting Hiccup's deal. I never expected him to come so far, downing a dragon no one had ever seen, only to throw away his chance to prove he was a warrior. Even when I saw it with my own eyes, I had thought that maybe, just maybe, the boy actually had the skill to deserve to be a warrior. Instead, he set the monster free. Then to make matters worse, we had been taken captive by Outcasts and had _my_ axe stolen. It was an heirloom, passed down for generations. It was irreplaceable and I just had to throw it at a man who could catch thrown axes in mid air. About the only good thing that happened was that the stench of eel was gone from my body. We had been captured. And if I had not agreed to come with Hiccup, chances were, I wouldn't be in this mess.

"So then what stops us from doing it now and returning things to the way they should be? I do not want wish to be soâ€¦ pink for much longer."

Hiccup sighed. "Well, I need to get my things back from Alvin and make our way out of here before we do anything else. Once everyone's awake, we can discuss our options."

"Good, in the mean time, I shall continue learning more about this 'boat' we are on," the strange boy said as he kept on examining the boat's hull, seemingly fascinated.

"You did not know what a boat was until thirty minutes ago," Hiccup stated.

"Correction, I knew what a boat was, I just never had a word to describe it before nowâ€¦ I just kept having to using different phrases like 'floating tree caves' to describe them."

I suddenly knew where I seen this boy before. I had only seen his back the previous night, but that was all I needed given that he had his back towards me. I realized at this point that boy _was_ a Night Fury, somehow transformed intoâ€¦ one of us. And he was talking with Hiccup about boats of all things. This day was getting weirder and weirder.

"Is he the Night Fury?" I whispered to Hiccup, so low that I hopefully did not alert the strange boy. I saw him nod in response. "Is he dangerous?"

Hiccup shook his head again. "No, he's honor-bound not to attack us." I raised my eyes at that, Hiccup clearly noticed by skepticism. The dragon had a sense of honor? Where could have ever learned that? "Yes, it's not what I expected either, but we did talk about among other things.. and apparently, dragons have honor." Assuming that the dragon was not a lying. What was I thinking? Dragons are supposed to be too stupid to even come up with lies, let alone talk.

"You were talking?"

"Nothing else to do, so we ended up speaking to each other, mostly justâ€¦ stuff. Like I had to explain how boats worked," Hiccup explained. "If I had the time and materials, I would have showed how books and reading and writing worked. Surprisingly, he wants to learn about those things, though that might just be because he does not know what it entails." A dragon interested in reading and writing. Even more weirdness, great. Most Vikings did not really care for _literature_, the only two Vikings on Berk who shared any sort of love for that art form were right in the same room as me. Though I appreciated being having the ability to read and write, I did not dedicate my life towards it the same way as Hiccup or Fishlegs did. And now, apparently there are dragons who are more interested in reading than most Vikings.

"I know you're talking about me over there," said the former dragon. "I believe I have been patient enough, we should wake the others while we have the chance." As he turned towards me for the first time. I noticed that the dragon seemed a bit green around his face and that his footing was rather sloppy as he approached. He was probably not used to walking on two legs, especially not in a moving ship. Thankfully, he did not look to be so sea sick that he could throw up. I did not want to have to see that. Hiccup got up from the ground and stood to meet him. I was surprised to notice that the new boy seemed slightly shorter than Hiccup, but made up for it with slightly more muscle. Overall, he seemed fairly normal. Were I to have met him without knowing the truth, I would never have guessed that he had been a dragon.

Hiccup turned to me. "I'll explain everything in just a momentâ€¦ Can you wake up Fishlegs and Camicazi? I would do it myself, but I don't want to risk being bludgeoned againâ€¦"

I went over to our sleeping companions and gently tapped them awake. Fishlegs and Camicazi lifted themselves, seeing blearily at the environment. Both of them, like me locked their eyes at Hiccup's dim

glowing eye. Like many animals, dragon eyes tended to glow slightly when exposed to light in dark places. I was assuming that like me, the other two had probably assumed that Hiccup was a dragon. "Don't be afraid, it's just us."

"B-but there's a dragonâ€¦" that was Fishlegs. "I can see it."

"There's no dragon." Sort of true. "It's just Hiccup."

"Hiccup, what happened to you?" Fishlegs, again. He likely now saw Hiccup's face more clearly. "Your eye is all dragony!" Strange likes apparently do think alike.

"And part of my face, the nails on my hand and probably my back and one of my feet as well." Hiccup parroted from our earlier conversation. "I kind of already had this conversation with Astrid."

"Ooh, first a Night Fury turning into a boy, now we got a boy turning into a dragon." It was Camicazi's voice now, optimistic. Apparently, she had an easier time remembering than I did, which admittedly made me more jealous than I should have. "There's never a dull moment around you, Hiccup." _Trust me, I know._

"Yeah," the boy responded, clearly embarrassed at the girl's cheers. "So now that you're all awakeâ€¦ there's someone you I would like you all to meet." He pointed at the former dragon, who had gone unnoticed by the other two up until this point.

Hiccup exchange a glance with the newcomer, as if conveying something. "Iâ€¦ my name is Toothless," he said. "I am â€¦ pleased to meet you. I was the dragon Hiccup had shot down from this morning in case you had forgottenâ€¦"

His name was Toothless? What kind of name was that? I suppose it made as much sense as naming a child 'Fishlegs'. I was glad that my parents had decided not to honor Viking naming tradition. I could have ended up with an utterly ridiculous name. As if on cue, Hiccup added, "And before you ask, I was the one who named him. Apparently dragons do not receive names until they do something really noteworthy and I figured for our sake he'd need one."

Fishlegs seemed to have gone pale, something that was difficult for me to see when we only had a few dim lanterns for light, though the little bit of previously unknown dragon knowledge made him seem more comfortable. Camicazi seemed simply thrilled to meet a new face, ignoring the fact that that a dragon was talking to them.

"My name is Camicazi, nice to meet you, too," she said cheerily.

"Uhâ€¦ my name is Fishlegs," he said with some obvious hint of fear in voice. We all knew he was afraid of the dark. In a boat hull that was barely lit with a dragon within arm's reach, his fear was more than justified.

"I'm Astrid," I added with a directed coldness in my voice.

"Your friends seem to have mixed reactions about meeting me," said

Toothless to Hiccup.

I would have interjected about stating that I was not exactly Hiccup's 'friend', but he had made his response first. "Not every day we get to a conversation with a dragon." The former dragon only nodded. "Well, anyways, I think it's clear that none of us want to be in Alvin's hands for long. Toothless is willing to lend us a hand and I think we'll need all the help we can get if we want to escape. Now does anyone have any questions."

"Why are you so trusting of a _dragon_, Hiccup?" I remember the reason Hiccup gave me last night, that he had looked into the dragon's eyes and saw a fear that _touched _him. I should have cleaved the dragon when I had the chance. "In fact, why did you try to convince Alvin to let him go?"

Toothless just stared at the boy. I imagine he has been wondering the same thing. "Because," he said, "No one, not even a dragon, should have to be held captive by _Alvin the Treacherous._ You know the stories my dad speaks about him?" I knew of only a few. Such as Alvin having sold men into slavery with a few lies or manipulating battles to suit his purposes. One man in particular who had been scored was Humongously Hotshot the Hero, at one time betrothed to Hiccup's mother. Overall, not a nice guy. And he my axe. Hiccup's response was not the answer I had been expecting, but then again, I had to admit, he did have solid principals. That still did not excuse the fact he would be helping a dragon.

Remembering Hiccup's statements earlier and realizing that they meant to return the dragon back to its 'trueself', I added, "And then you'll work to turn him back into a dragon so he can go back to blowing up our towers so they can steal our food, again."

Toothless looked offended and Hiccup seemed like he was going to respond, but Camicazi interjected "Pft, the Vikings Tribes steal and cheat each other all of the time, it's not like the dragons do anything different. Why just last week, I had stole some of Mogadon's sheep right from under his nose." Bog Burglars, the name said it all. Obsessive thieves.

"That's completely different," I protested. "Dragons are just animals."

This time, Toothless rebuked me. "For my whole life, I had thought the Herd, you humans, were mere animals as well and now, here I am talking with you over that. At this point, I do not know what to believe any more. All I want to do now is just go home." On that, we finally had something we could agree on. Look at me, sharing sympathy with a dragon, I must have been weaker than I thought I was.

"Look, Astrid," It was Hiccup. "I know that what I am asking you to doâ€ well, defies everything we had been taught, but well, I don't think anyone else has been in our position. _Ever._"

"Hiccup, he's a dragon," I said. "He might look human now, but in his heart, he's a dragon. It's hard to trust him knowing that. We hardly know him and everything he could have said up until now could be a finely crafted lie."

"I hardly know you either," Toothless stated, "And I find it just as

hard to trust in you, but I realize I have no choice in the matter. Either I work with you and hopefully return to the Nest or I do not and rot in a horrid cell under this 'Alvin' you fear so much."

"Fishlegs," I called towards the silent boy. I needed someone to back me up and I had hoped that Fishlegs would provide me with some justification.

"Our chances definitely go up the more of us working together," he said, finally speaking.

"Fine then," I gave up. No point in continuing to argue when peer pressure convinces you otherwise. "I'll work with you, dragon, but as soon as you're done, I expect you to go elsewhere."

Toothless grunted. "I intend to."

* * *

><p>It had been all of my fault. If I had simply done what everyone had told me to do from the beginning and stayed away from hunting dragons, I would not be in this mess. Astrid, Fishlegs, and Camicazi would have been relatively safe at Fort Sinister, more than likely surviving that battle. I would probably be there helping rebuild by helping fix up the Berserker village. And Toothless wouldâ€¦ be still a dragon, albeit a dragon who would destroy buildings, but very likely a contented dragon nonetheless. If it weren't for my desire to shoot him down, none of us would have become prisoners of Alvin the Treacherous. I _had _to set things right.

Granted, Alvin capturing us all was most definitely a result of Camicazi and I being Heirs to our Tribes. From the way Alvin went out of his way to come get us, it was clear to me that he had sought to put us for ransom. Fishlegs, Astrid, and Toothless were simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. If they had not been with Camicazi and I, they would not have been captured. Once we arrived at Outcast Island, Alvin would no doubt send messengers to my father and Bertha telling them about our capture. A ransom after all, was useless without informing the right people.

Parts of me had _changed_. More specifically, my hand had become clawed, left eye and a portion of my face around it, and given how uncomfortable my left foot and most of my back felt, I could add them to the list as well. Still did not know why those areas had changed as opposed to everywhere else, but without testing and observation, I would not know the answer. And I obviously do not want to test myself.

A less superstitious boy would have thought that things could not possibly get worse, but experience has taught me that things could indeed get much worse if given the right conditions. Right now, I considered the worst case scenario would be my dad seeing me with these newly grown scales upon my body and declaring me an exile and refusing to pay my ransom. Or worseâ€¦ if Toothless had been right and that I would become more of a dragon over time. If that happened, dad would pay my ransom just so he could chop up my head before I became a traitor to my own kind. That did not bear considering.

I had figured that the potion I had brewed was the cause of my current problem as I had strange symptoms ever since I had taken it. Mostly, it was that my eyes were better at adjusting to darkness than they ever were or that I my sense of smell allowed me to perceive smells with more clarity. Other than the eel allergy, I had thought those to be mere additional benefits of the beverage that were part of the benefits. Now though, my left eye was getting far too good at seeing in the dark. If it were not for my right eye being untransformed, I would have assumed that the inside of Alvin's ship was in fact a very brightly lit room.

Granted, if the potion did make me even more of a dragon, Toothless would be pleased.

Alvin had all ours belongings, especially the book that had started this all. If I could get that, I could solve at least two of my problems or give myself more options. Maybe there was something the book that might help, but given that the only thing that worked as intended was the plan involving the eels, there was no grantee. Technically, the other two things I had drew were _wonderful successes_ that worked a little too well. After all, Toothless cannot fly or breathe fire at me anymore and I was definitely stronger. But regardless of my track record with that book so far, I needed it if I ever wanted a mere chance at returning to humanity.

So our objectives were clear. We had to escape and we had to take the book along with us. Recovering everything else was secondary, but would be a nice bonus. Unfortunately for me, I did not know enough about Outcast Island in order to make any sort of formal plan other than the primary objectives and make a few default assumptions.

There was one thing however I knew I should do before anything else happened. I tore off one of my pant legs, the one belonging to the untransformed foot, using my clawed hand to slice the fabric. It was easier than I thought it would be. Thankfully, the skin there did not seem to have changed much. "What are you doing?" Astrid commented.

"I need to hide my face from Alvin, he does not need to know that I amâ€¦ changingâ€¦" Given how my _friends, _or at least people I wish I could consider my friends, reacted when they had seen my eye, there was no telling how someone like Alvin might do with me. I was hoping that Alvin had not seen it already. "So, whenever someone asks, just say that I was horribly disfiguredâ€¦" I placed the pant leg over that part of my transformed face, hopefully obscuring it. I had to get used to having one eye it seemed, but anything to hide that. "Does this hide it?" Astrid nodded. I then started cutting another piece off my other pant leg to obscure my clawed hand.

"Alvin has us... We're so doomed, doomed I say." Fishlegs mumbled. "Alvin's going to chop us up and sell us back to our parents piece by piece, or worse, offer us to the Romans and we'll never get home..." Fishlegs continued to mumble on about how distressing the situation was. He was clearly the most terrified. Astrid did not voice her opinion, though I had a hard time believing that I was actually looking at her face with some, well, worry. She definitely was doing a better job of suppressing her fears than I was, probably focusing on being mad. I must have looked like a raving lunatic.

"Not how I was expecting how the outing would go, but first time someone went out of his way to kidnap me when I have done nothing to them. Usually, they capture me when I fail to steal their belongings." Camicazi said. I heard enough about Camicazi enough to know she did not value being kidnapped the same way anyone else did.

I was scared of Alvin, really, I was. But I knew that panicking would not help us in the least. Though I did want to scream and shout to the heavens right now at whatever god decided my fate to be captured by Alvin. "Fishlegs, calm down, you're making me nervous."

"...We're doomed," he squealled. "Alvin's got us and you're... changing! Things are looking grim."

"I know, I know." And it was my fault to begin with. "Fish, just calm down. We can through this." _As long as I keep saying that, it should come true, right?_

"Hiccup, you got turned into part dragon, shouldn't you be worried?" Fishlegs remaked. I was worried, very very worried. I still knew next to nothing about it and I had no real way to solve it.

"Keep it down Fishlegs, I'm worried about it, I just can't do anything about it yet, I need my book back from Alvin I can do anything about it. No sense worrying about it too much when I can't do anything right?" I told him, feigning as much confidence as I could. Or maybe it was more to myself. Afterall, this situation was very grim.

"And Alvin..."

"Can be dealt with. We just need to keep calm and come up with a plan." This caused Fishlegs to momentarily back away, his lips quivering with anxiety, I did not blame him.

"So then, what's our plan Hiccup?" Camicazi chimed in. "You always seem have a plan."

"I'm still thinking, but whatever we do, we need to get our things back, especially our books and research notes. No telling what Alvin would do with knowledge like that." I just hoped that said Outcast might have been illiterate. It was not uncommon, especially in this day and age outside of Rome. And really only those born into wealth or privilege like me and most of those who I tried to associate with had anything to do with reading. Granted, the twins failed that class. "For now, we should work to pool as much information as possible once we arrive so we can plan our escape."

"Wait," Fishlegs spoke out, which surprised me. "We're not going to do the less reckless thing and not wait for your dad and to come rescue us with the fleet."

"Not going to happen," I replied, then turned to Toothless to make my point clear. "On count of someone having destroyed a sizable portion of the fleet." The boy blushed a faint red. "Say, why did you go after our boats and not say every other target like your _Kin_ did?" I used his word to describe dragons.

"My King ordâ€|" Dragons had a King? As in royalty? That was

intriguing. I would be not lying if I said that I had learned more about dragons in just today alone than I had in my the rest of my life. Toothless attempted to hide his slip of the tongue. "I was ordered to sink the boats without being told why, honest." Best not to push him about that, if the dragons had a King, it was not important to us right now. And why the dragons wanted the boats destroyed likely had little impact on our current situation anyways.

"I believe you," I replied dryly. "So anyways, every Tribe that was at Fort Sinister has had their a sizable chunk of their ships destroyed, meaning that unless my dad or Betha calls up some other tribe with a working fleet, we are not going to be rescued. At best, we will either be ransomed back to our homes or we escape. If we get ransomed back, we might not get our things back, which is important as I need that book in order to fix this mess. So we work on escaping." There was also no grantee that my father would be able to pay for not only Astrid and Fishlegs, but Toothless as well. I had no idea of just how much my father would be receiving from Oswald, especially with most of their village being in ruins.

"And how do you intend to do that?" Astrid commented. I did not know the answer to that yet.

"We need to learn more about Outcast Island first."

"While trapped in a cell," Astrid had a point. Alvin, I heard, was smart enough not to let very important prisoners from wandering around his island, where they could get ideas.

"We don't have to be trapped in a cell," provided Camicazi. _What does she mean by that? _Before I could ask she added. "Alvin may have taken us captives and _tried _to take all of our things." She emphasized the word _tried _enough for me to understand what she had meant.

"You have lock picks," I said, she nodded as she pulled out several hairpins from, well, her hair. For someone who had very wild hair, she did seem to have an awful lot of hair pins. That was just perfect. We now had a means to escape from our cells as we needed, provided the locks were standard and were something we could pull open.

"You can't keep a Bog Burglar under lock and key," the girl taunted. I was glad she had followed us now. It provided us with more options. "So why don't we just use these lockpicks to escape?"

"Because, that'd get us out of our cells, but not off the island," I added. "Okay, so maybe you can sneak in out of our cells every night so you can gather some information, lay the foundation for our various things that needed to be done. Things of that nature." She nodded again, a mischievous smile on her face.

"People will notice she's missing you know," Astrid commented.

I simply gave a smile, I already had ideas of how to deal with that, though I needed more time and resources to think that out first. With any luck, Alvin would make a mistake and decide to stick us together, rather than apart. It would be much easier to do our planning and conversation while in the same jail cell. "I'm working on

that."

"Perhaps if Alvin had captive dragonsâ€|" Toothless said. "Maybe they would aid us." Astrid looked more than bit upset, but did not act upon it. She was still suspicious of him after all.

"Maybe we could strike a deal with themâ€|" Toothless said. "A simple bargain would not be too hard to make."

"Assuming we find dragons on Outcast Island," I replied. "How are we going to communicate with them?"

"We're speaking right nowâ€|" Toothless commented, before realization had likely hit him. "Though you are right, there is no grantee they could understand me."

Before we could discuss more about our escape, an Outcast had stepped forth below the deck. The bright light of an afternoon sun stung my eyes a bit before they adjusted. I wished for but a moment that the sun light would stay around much longer. I might have only been held captive for what was, at most, a few hours, but it felt like a brief eternity in darkness.

Behind the first Outcast was a second and then a third. As they stepped into the darkness, I had a better look at what they were carrying. None of them were Alvin, thank Odin. Each of them, except for which held various black strips of cloth, the men held swords in their hands. "We've arrived at Outcast Island, put these on and we'll escort you to your new cell." The cloths were blindfolds, Alvin was wise not to let us learn where we were going. We did as we were told, knowing that facing a crew of what was at least forty warriors without weapons would get us all killed. I had to help Toothless as he was still not coordinated with his hands to tie the knot himself. "Wait, what's that on your face?" said the man, pointing at my 'eye patch'.

"Alvin horrifically disfigured meâ€| I do not want people looking at it," was my excuse.

"Really?" the man said. "Serves you right you weak Hooligans, best thing I ever did was leave your Tribe..." I blinked. The Outcast in front of me was a former Hairy Hooligan? Then I realized that Outcasts are not a traditional Viking Tribe by any means. They were made up solely of men and women who were cast out of their Tribes by breaking the laws. Hence their name, Outcasts. Given the odds, it was likely I'd run into former Hair Hooligans eventually. "Now put it on!" he yelled at me, which I swiftly complied.

I had no idea how much we walked, it felt far. My partially transformed foot made the walk more cumbersome than normal and Toothless stumbled several times, earning him several beatings during the trip. Other than that, the travel was completely uneventful as we were guided down twisting hallways and expanses by our Outcast escorts. Alvin had not seen fit to lead us himself or show himself too us.

Before long, we were in our new cell, some large hole that had been dug up and barred off with crudely assembled wooden branches. Thankfully, Alvin had seen fit to keep us all trapped in the same cage. Unfortunately, Alvin had the foresight to both keep our new

cell under constant super vision, via a pair of guards checked in every fifteen minutes. This made my plan of using Camicazi to spy for us that much harder. At the very least, the Outcasts had given us slightly better lighting, which was especially good for Fishlegs's sake.

After removing our blindfolds, the men had escorted us had decided it was the best time for lunch or breakfast, depending on how you looked at it. Unfortunately for Toothless and I, the meal was cooked eel. "Do they mean to kill us?" asked Toothless. "I do not want to receive indigestion."

"Eels cause dragons indigestion?" Fishlegs said, for the first time speaking with the dragon. Camicazi and Astrid were too busy playing a silent game of I-Spy, which in actuality was the pretext for a more serious game involving actual spy work. They were getting ready for when I would set my plan into motion.

"Some," Toothless admitted. "I think they have some sort of poison in them that causes it, I do not know. Also causes your throat to catch on fire. As a result, we all have an instinctive hatred and fear of them." I looked at the partially burned eel. While I did not necessarily like eels before now, I did not get outright unnerved at the very presence of them. Now that I realized that that burning sensation I felt when Astrid forced that eel into my mouth was common to dragons, it was very likely I had been changing ever since I had taken the potion.

"That would explain Hiccup's plan when we shot you down." Fishlegs continued. I saw him take a bite out of the eel, this caused Toothless to turn slightly green again. But to his surprise, the large boy did not vomit up his stomach's contents. "We threw eels at every dragon we could to fight our way to get you."

"I will admit, that was very cunning, using our own fear against us in such a manner," Toothless said. He eyed the eels more closely now. "And to down one such as me was no easy feat. Tell me, is Hiccup a great warrior amongst your Kin?"

I felt embarrassed to say the least. "No, I am not," I stated. "In fact, many would say that I was the worst my village had to offer. Some say I even caused more damage to Berk than you dragons ever did." Somehow, it felt rather humorous to laugh at my own failures, even if several of them involved burning down houses. About the only people who liked me consistently were the small home repair Vikings.

"Yet you downed me!" Toothless exclaimed. Somehow, I got the feeling that the knowledge I was a horrid Viking upset him immensely. "Surely you could not be all that bad." There was something rather odd about a dragon deciding to provide me morale support.

"Toothless, I kept trying to shoot you down for at least four years, I just got lucky."

"Well, no, you have not been trying to shoot me. I have only been participating in raids since the past month." That was odd, then again, I remembered that there was a second Night Fury involved in the raid at Fort Sinister. And well, now that I thought about it, Toothless did look like that had he been human would easily have been

in one of Gobber's Dragon Training classes, perhaps even as one of my classmatesâ€¦

"Really? So who have I been trying to shoot down." At this point Toothless bent down to eat his eel, perhaps deciding that maybe it would have been a good idea to try new things. The boy was about to use his jaw to scoop the eel into his throat, but then realized that he should have used his hand instead. However, he lacked human table manners and put the whole thing into his jaw and started chewing.

"My mother," he said between chews. The conversation had gotten awkward.

"I'm sorry for that then," I apologized.

Toothless chewed on the eel, seemingly enjoying the dish far more than he should have. In a moment, it was done and swallowed. "Don't be, I would not weep for her the day when she falls in battle." He seemed surprisingly cold when he said that. Did he have some sort of familial troubles? I decided that that was his problem and did not concern me. "You going to finish that?" he said as he pointed towards the untouched eel that was on my plate. Even though I was hungry, that urging at the back of my head made it clear to me that I should not put the eel into my mouth. I pushed the tray towards him and Toothless repeated his 'eating'.

"If this was a dream, I would really like to wake up now," Fishlegs commented. I believe everyone shared his sentiments.

* * *

><p>I had awoken, realizing the events of the previous day were not a dream. I had become one of the Herd, a human, a term I had not even known about since my transformation. I had eaten two of the accursed eels and enjoyed it. I had spoken to humans, conversed with them over the most trivial of things, even swearing an oath to aid one of them. I had a name.

I looked at my now pink hands. They were not paws, they lacked claws and were far more nimble than what I had spent my whole life using. I realized that though I had sworn an oath to aid Hiccup, I did not know what I was capable of. As a dragon, as one of the Kin, I reminded myself, I had the Breath to level buildings and ships alike. I had the black scales that shielded me in the night sky. I had wings, making me the greatest flier amongst my Kin. As human, I had none of those things. I was useless.

I searched around for Hiccup, but found myself unable. Everyone else seemed to be awake, looking out at the hallway. I turned and say that my ally had been taken by those Outcast warriors who had taken us to this new cage the previous day. "Hiccup!" I yelled.

It turned and looked at me. "Don't worry, I'll be fine!" and with that Hiccup was gone.

I slumped back onto the ground, frowning. Hiccup had been taken for what purpose, I did not know, but it ultimately unsettled me. I turned to Fishlegs and Camicazi, who seemed to be more amiable me than Astrid. "What do we do?"

Fishlegs replied to me first, looking far more depressed than anything. "We wait."

"Or we can play a game!" cheered Camicazi.

A game sounded interesting, though I failed to see what could be done while we were in a cage. "What kind of game?"

"Spin the bottle of course," the excited blonde furred one said. I looked at the 'bottle' intently.

"Where did you get that?" Astrid involved herself.

Fishlegs and Camicazi looked at the cage we were in and found that the hallway was empty. "Guy stole it from the guard who was supposed to watch us last night. Guy got drunk and she decided to practice picking the lock."

"Aye," Camicazi said. "So anyways if the bottle points at you, you have to say an embarrassing secret!"

Suddenly, I realized what the game was. "Oh, that sort of game?" Amongst the young Kin, there was a similar game, but it involved a piece of driftwood or ice or rock in place of the bottle. And I figured that if it was anything like the game I was familiar with it was one of those games that had utterly ridiculous challenges of some sort. Granted, I do not recall any game where my only option was to tell a secret of some sort. Especially not an embarrassing one. Though, it might have been that normal challenges would be impossible given the current situation. "I suppose I could participate."

Astrid eyed me, her eyes looked heavy from a lack of sleep. Something last night might have unsettled her. "I'll join, too," Astrid stated.

Camicazi set the bottle on the ground and spun it. All of us hoped that were not the victim. Slowly, the bottle began to lose momentum and grinded to a halt. The bottle pointed at Fishlegs and it looked rather terrified. I smirked, knowing the feeling, but reveling it for this was all in good fun. "Alright, Iâ€¦" Fishlegs stammered. "I wish I had a pet, wait, no friend, well, maybe girlfriend." He, (since I finally had a term that hopefully helped clarify what gender he was, girlfriend did imply that he was well, a he) clearly felt embarrassed, despite his secret seemingly nothing being all that special or unique.

"Ooh, that's a good one!" Camicazi spun the bottle again, again landing on Fishlegs.

"Oh come on!" Fishlegs yelled.

"Hey," Astrid commented, for the first time I had seen it, genuinely laughing. "Those are the rules, you have to follow them."

"Fine," Fishlegs continued. "Before Hiccup became all dragonyâ€¦ I was thinking of making his potion and drinking it for myself."

"Why?" Astrid asked. "You're plenty strong." Honestly, as the

biggest, Fishlegs did look like he could probably crush my head a variety of different ways now. Except if it were not for the fact that he seemed very timid about things, especially the darkness.

"Well, I don't know," Fishlegs said. "But maybe, you know, I'd be more confident with itâ€¦" Camicazi spun the bottle yet again, and again it landed on Fishlegs. "This game is rigged!" We all just laughed at this._ He is so unlucky._

"Fine, fine, don't be such a baby," Camicazi said, spinning the bottle only for it to land on Astrid.

Astrid sat there for a moment, clearly thinking about what it had wanted to say. I relished the at the thought of what truly embarrassing or humiliating thoughts came from the one who held such scorn for me. "Okay, after seeing Hiccup, I got to wonderingâ€¦ what if he becameâ€¦all dragon?" she held some concern in her voice, clearly this was important to her.

I chose not to answer, but if I did, I would reply with, "And then I would teach him flying just as he taught me walking." After all, I did manage to accrue a sort of debt to him for his _lessons._ Honor demanded that I pay those debts, eventually.

"Was it a nightmare?" Fishlegs said, concerned. "I mean, we don't know if Hiccup will goâ€¦ all dragon yet, right?"

"It's a dream, Fishlegs, I don't know if it would really happen," Astrid said. "I saw him enjoy itâ€¦ Flying, breathing fire, just being a dragonâ€¦ and then. He offered us a chance to join himâ€¦ and we all did." Astrid's dream brought up an interesting question. What if I also requested others to come follow me back into being a dragon?

"Ooh, what did I turn into?" Camicazi asked. "If I turned, I would like to be a Changewing. They can go invisible!"

Astrid seemed like she was regretting sharing her dream. "Forget I said anything then," Astrid said.

"Fine, moving right along!" Camicazi spun the bottle again. This time, it was me.

I was prepared. I had spent all of the past day not knowing whether or not everyone around me was male or female. I could not smell the chemical signatures with my duller nose and the clothing everyone wore made it difficult for me to check. Then again, I had never seen a human without clothes before and had never so much as been this close to humans in general. And well, asking Kin for personal information such as this was not something I would stoop myself down to without a good excuse. I had to assume that is something that also applied to the humans, considering how much overlapped between our two difference species. Now was the excuse I needed. "I cannot tell human males and females apart, this includes all of you".

Hiccup's friends all laughed, even Astrid. Shortly after they stopped laughing, they informed me that Camicazi and Astrid were females, Fishlegs and Hiccup were male, and the very basics of what clothing and parts of the physical appearance determined sex. Such as beards

and mustaches were usually on adult men. Apparently, some women grew thick beards. It wasâ€| really embarrassing to say the least.

Camicazi did not spin the bottle this time. "This time I think I'll volunteer to go, anyone else mind?" I nodded. Everyone along with me. I wondered what Camicazi has seen fit to share with us. After all everyone else went, Fishlegs went twice. There was no harm in one of us breaking the rules just a little bit."Soâ€| Toothless," She was referring to me. " I think that you do not look half bad for a dragonâ€| "

Everyone else, including me, had their jaws drop in surprise. I was being flirted upon by one of the _Herd_. Then Camicazi just laughed. "Ha! I got you all! You should have seen the look on your faces!"

"You lied!" I coughed.

"No, you all just decided to leap to the romantic conclusion," the girl stated.

Astrid called her out, willing even to work alongside me.. "That's not an embarrassing secret."

"It was embarrassing, for you." Camicazi smirked. "I will admit though, you look pretty good, for a dragon that is." I hoped that was all she thought about me. Besides, we would be incompatible anyways. I was a dragon, she a human.

* * *

><p>I have decided I hated the Outcasts. Their cages were too full. Full of captives, prisoners, and slaves. Human and dragon alike. All sharing the same brand, the Outcast crest denoting them as property not people. They were based on the ancient slavemarks, though customized and labeling the ones who had placed them into slavery. The only thing that stopped Alvin from branding me and my friends was that we were still too useful unmarked. But for how long? How long would we be freemen?

As I was escorted by Outcast guards towards what I assumed was to be Alvin's main headquarters, I realized that in these cages, in this prison, that humankind and dragonkind were more than equal. Equal in bondage, equal in suffering. And having spoken to Toothless, I wondered if other dragons were like him. If they were intelligent, capable of honor, learning, being in a sense, human. If that was true, then they truly were equal here. Equally tragic. Maybe this sudden empathy into a different species had been the result of the fact that I was in the process of changing mine, but somehow, I doubted that.

My chest feltâ€| scallier in various places. It seemed that my changes had a random pattern and progression. I could not pin point what determined what areas of me changed yet, but I had felt that overall, I had changed slightly less today than I had yesterday. When I had the chance, I had Fishlegs check my back and I had examined my left foot. Sure enough, both areas were developing a light coating of black scale, with my toe nails sharpening and twisting into claws. Still, I did not have to worry about adding more coverings to hide my

transformation, as my clothes hid them well enough.

Traveling the twisted and likely deliberately confusing tunnels of the Outcast settlement had taken sooner than I had thought. It had been far too confusing for me to have completely put it down to memory, but I felt that I at least learned the very basics. Though that would not save my life if it came down to it.

I arrived inside a locked room, another dug out area. It appeared to be a workshop of some sort, buried deep underground. The guards left me inside, alone. With Alvin. He seemed delighted to see me. "Hello, Alvin," I said, trying to hide emotion.

"I'm sure you're father's told you plenty about your island's most feared enemy." My dad did in fact tell me countless stories about Alvin and his cruelty and viciousness, but I did not want him to know that. Alvin wanted to scare me to make me easier for him to manipulate, which was why he had left me alone with him. But I knew I needed control. I did not want to show him any fear. If I did, I knew I was as good as dead.

"Wh-who's that? Oh, right, uh, you. No. Not so much." I lied.

"Really? Not a word?" The man seemed genuinely surprised. Key word is 'seemed', I could not take any chances in assuming he had been genuine or not.

"Nope." I said flatly. That seemed to shut the man up while he thought of how he was going to handle things.

"So, what's that about your eye?"

"Oh that?" I pointed to my eye patch. "You disfigured my face when we first met." I said in the most nonthreatening tone I could manage. "Vikings lose body parts and limbs all of the time, so it's no big deal." Alvin seemed to be convinced, though I could still imagine he was trying to hide his skepticism. "So, Al," I tried to feign respect for him. "What have you brought me here for?"

"I heard you were a different," said Alvin. That did not sound all too good for my sake. "And now I had seen it." Alvin threw down one of my notebooks onto a table. He opened it, flipping through the various pages, each of them listing some sort of various technological device that only ended in failure when I tested it. "You're a genius," he said, "A clever genius, as if you were taking lessons from Loki himself." _Great, just great, the one time I have someone appreciate my inventions, it's Alvin the Treacherous. I really hope you're happy, Odin._

It rattled me more than any death threat Alvin could have thought up, but I felt I could use that to my advantage. All I had to do was omit that every one of those devices was a failure. "Yeah, that's all my designs, maybe some influence from Rome and Greece, but mostly my making."

"And you also practice sorcery," Alvin stated, showing me the black scaled book that got me into this mess in the first place. I now realized why Alvin had brought me here. And that he may have changed his mind about keeping me his hostage for a mere ransom alone. "How

could I have missed an important detail like that?"

"And you could use a genius sorcerer like me." This caused the man to grin.

Before I could state my refusal, Alvin continued. "Exactly. And before you could say no, allow me to make you an offer. I know that Bertha will want to get her daughters back and will pay any price to do so." He must have meant Astrid and Camicazi. And in fairness to Alvin, they did look so alike that I could say they were twins if I did not know better. "But those boys on the otherhand, I know they aren't Heirs, I know Stoic would not lift a finger to save their lives." _But I would._ "I don't know who they are, but you clearly care about them. So I'll make you an offer, work for me, or I feed them this!" Alvin lifted a large cooking pot onto the table, inscribed with various runes and arcane symbols. He opened the lid and a foul stench came bubbling out of the cauldron.

"What is that?" I exclaimed. I pinched my nose. The liquid inside was green and foul looking.

"Tried brewing that strength potion recipe in that book, didn't work. Even though, I followed all of the directions." I blinked. This potion was different, it looked well, like a mix of various foul ingredients instead of the molten metal I had brewed the night before I left Berk.

"Yeah, the strength potion is a bit of a failure," I partially lied, partially told the truth. "How do you know it was a failure?"

"Oh I tested it out on some of the slaves." Alvin pointed me to a corner in the back of the room. There I saw the ambiguous shapes of three bodies covered under sheets. It seems Alvin was smarter than I had been and decided not to test the potion for himself. "Just the old and infirm, hoped to get some more mileage out of them before they died anyways. Their deaths were quite painful." And I did not fail to misunderstand the subtext of: "Your friends will die that way, too, if you do not work for me."

So I decided to use this opportunity to my advantage. "Alright, Alvin, I'll give you what you want."

"Excellent."

I was not done yet, I needed to ensure the deck was stacked into my favor before I decided on what plans I would have. "But first, I'm going to need my friends you want to kill so badly."

"For what reason, do you need your friends?" Alvin was right to be skeptical.

"Oh, nothing, I just need my assistants," I lied. Technically, Fishlegs was in a way my assistant, but I wanted to make Toothless as combat able as he needed to. Whatever escape plan I was going to have, violence might be required. So I resolved "I cannot do work without them."

"And why would you not use one of my Outcasts?"

"Would you trust your Outcasts with such delicate work?" This

time, my excuse was legitimate.

"Uh," Alvin stammered. "You do bring up a good point. But only one of them and none of the Bog Burglars." Not having access to Camicazi or Astrid for this purpose was fine, I knew both of them were combat capable already. I only needed to work with Fishlegs because he at least knew most of the stuff I would be talk about and Toothless because he was still not used to his body.

"I need both of them, just let me alternate between the two of them and I should be fine."

"Fine," Alvin seemed to have gotten tired of negotiating with me. Which was fine by me, I had everything I needed. The Outcast Chieftain had given me the means I would need to escape, willingly.

I wondered for a moment that though Alvin had been called 'the Treacherous', how many times had he been the victim of treachery?

* * *

><p>This chapter took me forever to decide what I wanted to write about. At the end, I realized that because I only had boats to work with, I decided why not make a large part of the chapter deal with boats. Did some basic research to figure out how Viking longboats were made and decided to show a bit of what I learned.

The spin the bottle thing and the various ship tease involved in this chapter are not meant to be taken seriously. Shipping is not something I normally partake in, but I felt that teasing about it, making allusions, and so forth would be good fodder for funny moments.

Also, I decided that Toothless did not know anyone's gender was due in part a result of wellâ€¦ logic. As a dragon, the anatomy he is used to understanding is completely different from what we have as humans. Hindering his understanding further is everyone's clothes. The only thing he is sure of is that he is a he. So I decided to make a small joke out of it.

Alvin, I decided for all of his cunning and well cleverness, is still very prone to underestimating his enemy. Especially when said enemy is a child relatively speaking. And well, pride before the fall. Hopefully, I portrayed him correctly or at least close as I could to what he is depicted as.

Also, someone do me a favor and write me a transformation fic that does not involve Hiccup or Toothless being transformed. There is an appalling lack of transformation fics centered on the other characters and other species of dragon. Just imagine the sort of **_relationship**_** Fishlegs and Meatlug would have when they are the same species. The confusion of the twins suddenly having to share a body or alternatively Barf and Belch having their own separate bodies for once in their lives. And the discussions Snotlout and Hookfang would have would be priceless given their weird relationship. Only one I ever seen had Stoic of all people turn into a Terror and that was a very long time ago.**

5. Chapter 5

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****Thinking about starting a forum to provide feedback more effectively and to form a social group for this. Anyone think this may be a good idea? Or maybe if there are other options. I think I need to start making a place where I can start explaining the little details I place in my story, specifically on the parts that few might not notice or really pay attention to.****

****Editted Oct 20, 2013, as a result of some issues I overlooked but pointed at to me by a reveiwer. As result, I have edited chapters 4 and 5 slightly to address issues that I had made. Core details are the same, but I felt I needed to add details addressing the issues I failed to notice when writing the chapters the first time.****

* * *

><p>I was alone. No matter how much I tried to think about it, I was alone. I stood on the top deck, looking at the sunlight reflect beautifully amidst the waves. The skies were as clear as the day we had set out on this mad voyage. If I was not mourning the disappearance of my son, I would have blessed Freya for the light. Instead, I was moping. I had wanted this trip to last longer, to give my son more time to prepare for the oncoming raid. I would have showed him the proper way to hold a sword, the ways he could use a shield to fight, the various tricks to beat a dragon senseless. He would have been at my side, doing glorious battle against our eternal enemies.<p>

This time, I had made it a point to chase after that monster, in the hopes that my son would repeat his previous attempts. This time, I resolved myself to help him in any way I could. This time, we would finally have something to talk about. What greater joy than a father could have to share his finest hour with his son?

Instead he wasn't. It was only after the battle had I learned that there two of the accursed beasts and that my son had decided to chase after the other one off in the other side of Fort Sinister. The last anyone had seen of him, he had gotten the mad idea to throw eels at dragons to scare them off while charging into an existing fight with half of his class and a Bog Burglar. _And it worked._ _As if Loki had decided to favor such insanity._

That had been the last anyone had seen of my boy. He along with his friends had seemingly disappeared completely. Nothing remained of them except for the extra clothes they stored in their rooms. I feared that they might have died. No one knew what had happened to them. I feared that they might have died, burned away to a mere cinder beyond recognition. I prayed to Odin, the greatest of fathers, that he was alive. A sign, a symbol proving he was alive. I did not want to spend hours on end, hoping and praying for a loved one to return, not again.

But now, I had to set sail for home, without my son. For three days since the battle, I had searched tirelessly for Hiccup, but found no clues as to his whereabouts. On the third day, Oswald had requested

we leave, as the contract for hospitality had expired and the Chief had refused to renew it. _For our own good_.

Unfortunately, with most of our ships lost, the five surviving craft would have to make return trips. I was to lead the first evacuation, again at Oswald's request. About the only thing that prevented this trip from being a total failure was that the Berserkers were true to their word and gave much in food as was promised. I doubted I would see Oswald again.

"You're worried about _him_, aren't you?" said a voice behind me. I turned and found Snotlout, my nephew, looking in much the same sorry state I did. "I'm worried about _her_." He was referring to that Hofferson girl, the one nearly _every_ _boy_ my son's age had a crush on.

"I'm sure she's fine," I lied.

"She went with Hiccup, when Thuggory separated us. I should have gone with them, maybe I could have stopped them fromâ€¦ disappearing."

"Or just maybe, your class would be just down to the twinsâ€¦" I did not necessarily dislike the Thorson twins, Tuffnut and Ruffnut, but I was unwilling to teach a class that consisted solely of them. Granted, Gobber would likely be taking over for me if I decided to set sailing to find the Nest and more importantly my son.

"I still should have been there." Why was he so depressed? It wasâ€¦ odd to see the boy who in many ways was the ideal Viking reduced to moping. Then again, with the Hofferson girl and most of his class missingâ€¦

I asked him breaking from that train of thought. "What stopped you?"

"I wanted to down the Night Fury before Hiccup did." So a case of the typical rivalry, yet again. I swear everything that happened between both of those boys seems to have started since they were five.

"No one man has ever bested a Night Fury," I said. "Or even a group of men. Wouldn't it have been better to work together?"

"We kind of.. .got in to a fight," I flinched at that, hoping that Snotlout did not do any lasting harm to my son or having been the reason for disappearance. The boy did not seem to have been proud to say this. "Hiccup punched me so hard he made my nose bleedâ€¦" That surprised me. A nose bleed in itself is not very hard to inflict, if you were a strong enough Viking. But for one such as Hiccup, that wasâ€¦ difficult. "I know, that surprised me, too. And well, I got upset at him and almost hit him backâ€¦ then Astrid asked me to stop and well, Thuggory took usâ€¦ and you know the rest."

"Son, whatever happened is not your fault." _Because it was mine_. I _should have been wiser_. _"You could not have possibly known that they would disappear."_

"I guess you're right." He looked out thoughtfully out at the sea. "Chief Stoic. May I ask a favor?"

I did not like the sound of that. While it was all noble and honorable to keeping promises, sometimes, it is best not to get involved with them. But it was only fair that I listen to requests, before denying them. After all, it could have been something trivial. If only it was ever that simple. "What would that be?"

"I want to save Astrid," he said, I knew where this was heading. Hopefully he was not motivated by some selfish rescuer's fantasy. I seen many man destroy himself both before, during, _and after_ perusing such selfish desires. "Andâ€¦ I guess maybe Hiccup and Fishlegs..." At least he remembered to mention my son and his friend, so that was an improvement.

"No," I answered before letting him finish his request. "We still don't know where they are and even if we did, I do not think it would be bring you along."

"Why not?"

I sighed and took a drink from a bottle of mead. I had to be honest with the boy, no matter how much it hurt him. For all of Snotlout's pomp and attitude, I knew he had in many ways less confidence in himself than my son had in himself and _that_ was saying something. The boy tended to crack under doubt and was surprisingly easy to intimidate. I blamed my brother for that. "Snotlout," I began. "If we do find them, you have to let the warriors handle it."

"But I am a warrior now!" he insisted. One battle did not make someone an actual warrior. It was fighting and enduring hardships that toughened the core of a man into steel. It was years of practice and experience that tempered the edge. A warrior is not a boy willing to fight enemies for the sake of a loved one, though a boy who fought for love could definitely be a warrior.

"Warrior-in-training," I corrected. "Class is still not dismissed. You're not fully trained. You've got the mindset and the talent, but not the experience or the knowledge. You rely too much on your brawn and not enough on your brain." While it is true Vikings were not the most intellectual people, there were still standards. There was a reason why Dogsbreath the Duhbrain, the stupidest Viking on Berk was not allowed to go into dragon training.

Snotlout's face turned into a frown, his expression showing shock. I had just given him the exact opposite of the criticism everyone had on Hiccup after all. He recollected himself in a moment. "I do use my head!" he protested.

"I don't see you use it much other than for headbutting. My point is that you're not going to help us by joining, not if you don't show us you can do more than just punching really hard."

"Then what can I do to prove myself then?" he said, clearly seeing a challenge. I realized my poor word choice made it seem like he had a chance.

"I don't know." I admitted. "Do something smart enough and maybe I could let you join in."

"And what would that be?"

"Well, part of the challenge is having to be smart enough to figure out what is considered smart in the first place." Admittedly, I was dodging the question, but well, I doubted Snotlout could ever come up with something that would qualify. It just was not his preferences.

At that point, Snotlout decided to leave me. I saw him go towards the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, and they began discussing something that interested them. Hopefully they wasn't thinking of doing something mad. _What am I thinking, of course they would do something mad._ Now that I thought about it, maybe madness runs in the family.

* * *

><p>"I hate this plan of yours," said Fishlegs to me. I could not blame him, especially since I seen the amount of ways this idea could backfire a mile away. All it would take is Alvin to notice that Camicazi was outside of our cage and that I had decided to consume more resources than I should for designing an experimental crossbow. If Alvin noticed that, we were all dead.<p>

"I agree," I said as I held up and balanced a freshly made yesterday crossbow. I had spent much of yesterday building it myself as a test of my own skill towards Alvin. It was rushed and though it was perfectly a serviceable weapon, it was a prototype for the intended goal. "But we don't exactly have a choice do we."

For someone who was known to be very deceitful, Alvin was surprisingly easy to fool. At least, assuming this was not a layer of deception in of itself. _Let's not go down that road_ I had remind myself not to get too paranoid that it was unhealthy. _Because we all know it is healthy to be at least somewhat paranoid._ _Yesterday, I had gotten most of everything I needed from the Outcast Chief, but my stay in his workshop had other stipulations I had to endure.

First off, if I needed things for any projects, I had to request it from Alvin, limiting my resources severely. Second, I would not be allowed to have access to the strange book I received without supervision, as Alvin believed it to be too dangerous to allow a sorcerer (which I was not, but Alvin thought I was anyways) access to that kind of books.

Additionally, there was to be a guard positioned outside the workshop at most times of the day. Far away enough from the door that he can't over hear us talking, but enough to prevent us from leaving the room without escorts; me and my guest for today, Fishlegs, would be confined in this place until we would be escorted back to our cell. Tomorrow, it would be Toothless's turn.

After the agreement I struck with Alvin, I was hauled back towards the jail cell where the others waited for my return. Admittedly, I was surprised to find them playing that ridiculous game with a stole mead bottle. More surprising was that I learned that Toothless used this opportunity to acquire more knowledge about human customs and practices. During that game, he managed to learn to distinguish human genders, learn the function of clothing and what 'modesty' was, and figured out what that pot that we kept around the room was for. I would be lying if I said that I did not know how they were related.

When I had been sent back, I had gone over the basic tenants of my plan, only going over the overall idea and general goals yet again, but with the added information given from the preliminary scouting of Camicazi and my own observations. Before I had seen the other captives the Outcasts held, I was perfectly willing and able to abandon them when we made our escape. After however, I knew that my conscience would not let me leave them here. So now, whatever plan I decided on, it had to include them somehow, to the displeasure of others. Especially Toothless, though I had no idea why.

"You're promising Alvin weapons!"

"Several actually," I corrected. "It's only crossbows, for now." And besides, I'm not going to be building him anything until after I am done perfecting the design. Which I intend to take quite a while.

"He could use those weapons to conquer the whole Archipelago."

"Fishlegs, you're being unrealistic. And besides, I'm just one guy, I don't think a few fancy crossbows is going to make up for the logistical problems of the Outcasts. There's not enough Outcasts to take over a whole village for very long, let alone the whole Archipelago." The Outcast Tribe for, or perhaps because of, all of its ruthlessness is one of the smallest Viking Tribes. Few people are actually born here, most are well outcasts from all the other Tribes. They were numerous enough to hold their own in a war against the other tribes, but in the end, they were not really all that powerful. Fights with them were less actual battles and more the Outcasts staging hit and run attacks at weak points. Their primary weapons were fear, not numbers.

"A crossbow capable of iterative attacks is pretty deadly." Fishlegs referring to the primary project Alvin had tasked me, which had been my primary goal from the beginning. Crossbows, which powerful had the weakness of having a long interval between shots in comparison to using a traditional longbow. One of my 'kill that Night Fury' plans had been to create a crossbow that could shoot much faster than normal. I just never got around to building a repeating crossbow until now.

"The arrows lose power because of weaker draw strength, you'd have to poison them to make them equally as deadly as a regular arrow. On top of that, they have a much shorter maximum range capping out at one hundred and twenty meters." The downside to the design was that it was not lethal enough especially without things like poison to add more killing potential.

"And you're trying to remove their penalties to attack," Fishlegs complained.

"Yes, but at the cost of dropping capacity and increasing the shot intervals." For every design choice, there is a cost to employing it. While the prototype design called for shooting more arrows in quick succession at a rate of about ten arrows in fifteen seconds, I decided changing the mechanisms around to raising the power at the cost of speed would have been better given the world which I lived in. The goal would be to cut the shooting rate by half, but at least

tripling the draw strength, making it somewhat closer to a more traditional crossbow, but with easier reloading ability.

After having spent enough time inspecting it, I handed Fishlegs my crossbow. He frowned, but accepted it anyways. "I really question the merit of handing _me _of all people your weapon."

"If I can get you to use it properly, I can get anyone." I proclaimed. And I needed to do some bug testing. Fishlegs was a lousy archer, but a crossbow is a much different weapon than a bow. For all of its elegant simplicity, a bow is a weapon that is very difficult to learn and master, while a crossbow was while more expensive and complex, it was much easier to learn and fire a crossbow. According to my father, who had learned this saying while off adventuring: "If you want to make a good bowman, start with his grandfather." But for a crossbow, even _I _could use it.

I pointed at the target at the opposite side of the workshop and Fishlegs shot it. His posture was fine. His grip on the weapon was firm. And contrary to what he believed as a child, Fishlegs had good eyes. His problem was that I had seen him overestimate the effects of the recoil the weapon would have. As result, he ended up and pointed the crossbow down at the last moment. This caused the bolt to hit the wall at the wrong point and ricochet off of it then moving to another wall. Which was impossible, crossbow bolts should not ricochet like that. Maybe Fishlegs really was that bad... or cursed. Curses are real, I believe it after all of the stuff Thor was putting me through this week alone.

The projectile bounced several more times, off of furniture, off of tools, off of equipment. And then suddenly the arrow stopped bouncing as it sunk itself in a very different spot Fishlegs and I had planned. The arrow went through my foot. It hurt, very, very much. I wanted to scream but tried to hold it back in my own throat. "Owâ€|Owâ€|" I managed to say instead. If I ended up screaming in pain here, Alvin might decide to fire my friend right then and right there. Literally.

"Hiccup!" Fishlegs said as he set the crossbow aside. "Oh, sorry! It's all my fault."

"It's alright, Fish." I said as I gritted my teeth into a fake smile. I sat down on a stone bench right by the anvil. "I don't blame you for that." I lied, even though it was mostly true. I had to remind myself that it was my fault for asking him in the first place.

"Are you going to be alright?" Fishlegs asked with concern.

"I think I will be fine," I replied. "Just help me pull it out and get my foot dressed." I raised my right foot on the other part of the bench for Fish to have a better time treating the injury. The arrow was still sticking out of foot, leaving a trail of blood.

"You want me to just yank it out?" Fishlegs said, "That's not exactly sound medical practice, you know."

"It's the dark ages," I replied. I had seen this thing happen before. "This sort of thing happens all of the time. Look, the wound is not very deep, as the arrow had to go through my boot. Just yank it out, we'll figure out something." It still hurt though and focusing on the

facts just helped me distract me from my own pain.

"Fine, just keep calm, okay?" Fishlegs replied as he placed his hands in position to pull it out.

He pulled it out. I gritted my teeth in a smile and held the scream for a moment to let it die to down. It hurt more now, but it had to be removed eventually. During this time, Fishlegs took the opportunity to remove my boot and find some fresh clothes to wipe off the blood. I saw the wound with my untransformed eye, blood oozed out a small hole. I wondered how long it would be before I would walk without pain once again. A week, a month, maybe never. If it had been a proper crossbow and had the arrow not ricocheted off of the walls several dozen times, I probably would have mangled my foot. Right now, I was just glad I was not losing it right now.

Thoughts however died when I saw something that alarmed me even more than the fact the blood oozed out of the wound. The blood rapidly clotted around the wound. While much of the blood still remained a viscous red liquid, pretty much all of the blood that was directly on top of the gaping hole in my skin rapidly transformed into a scab within a minute of observation. Even better the scab started to fade just as rapidly as it came back.

I moved my foot, it did not hurt any more. It was incredible, I saw a saw a process of healing that would have taken weeks happen in mere _minutes._ In fact, I had healed the injury faster than the blood that had leaked out of the wound was being dried of.

But it was all too good to be true. At that point, I felt a surge of pain course through the whole of my right foot. I saw the nails on my toes sharpen. I saw the shape of my foot become rounder and larger. My foot was undergoing a transformation, like the other parts of my body. When I had awoken today, I had thought that I would no longer be changing spontaneously. Now that I had seen and experienced it for myself, I now knew why I had not experienced a change until just now.

Fishlegs returned with a bucket filled with water and a wash cloth. He dropped it on the spot, noticing the same things I had been seeing. I could not blame him. His only response was, "That is freaky. What do you suppose causes that?"

"Injuries." I stated flatly, examining my new foot. It wasn't longer than it had been before and the scales had completely engulfed. Unfortunately, it had grown large enough that I would need to come up with a bigger excuse for why I had a sudden change in foot wear. It was not going back in my old boot, especially with the hole it has.

"Injuries?"

"It makes sense now that I thought about it." Looking back, I had realized that every part of me that had changed had been subject to a physical injury of some sort. Astrid's repeated punches on the Outcast ship caused me to grow scale on my chest in random places, her axe also caused my left foot to grow scales, the damage I inflicted on myself when I hit Snotlout made my left hand have claws, Snotlout and Alvin throwing me on the ground affected my backside, and lastly Alvin punching my left eye gave me the ability to see in

the dark. _When I had said that Alvin disfigured my face, I was just making up a silly excuse. Now I realize how true that statement is._

It scared me, finally knowing that triggered my changes. I had hoped that knowing triggered my transformation would give me peace, give me a means to preserve my slowly ebbing humanity, but no, that was not possible. Some people have all the luck. They either got an animal skin that they could simply take on or off to get to their desired form or maybe had a spell that when cast would instantly change them. No, not me, I had to drink a potion that makes me more dragon every time I got hurt. _What kind of gods ordained this fate on me? What did I do to deserve this?_

"So getting hurt changes you?" It sounded silly, but the truth was worse. Any injury I would suffer could potentially cause me to become a little... less me. Given my tendency for accidents made this even worse. If a single arrow would do that, I shivered at the thought of what a sword could do. Or for that matter, would it be limited to just physical impact injuries? Would getting a cold twist my internal organs into a dragon's? And for that matter... how injured would I have to get to change fully? None of that bore thinking, all of it was unpleasant. I needed something to think on something more positive.

"Apparently. Completely heals the injury too." As I said that, I stood up from the bench. It was awkward walking with two feet that were differently sized and shaped, but for the most part, it was doable. In fact, I felt that my foot felt a bit better, despite being a completely different shape. How did that work? It made no sense, but it was the only mercy I received.

"That's pretty cool actually, wonder how much can you..."

I frowned, not wanting to think too hard on it. "Fishlegs, please don't." _Because I don't want to have to find out._

"Sorry... So, I also think that the severity of the injury also determines the extent of the changes," Fishlegs added.

"What gives you that idea?" I replied.

Fishlegs pointed my left boot. "Because your left foot only grew scales after Astrid crushed it with the pommel of her axe. The right changed seems to have much more from a serious injury." There was also the serious implication that I could, in theory, transform wholly into a dragon if I got damaged enough. I wondered how injured would I have to be before that happened.

"I guess you're right. That's one mystery solved then, are there any more we can solve then?" I asked Fishlegs. I needed something else to do, something that wasn't likely to make me lose my humanity. Anything.

"Okay so what about Camicazi's present? I mean you gave her a bunch of metal rods. What is she supposed to do with that?"

"Oh, nothing." During the time I spent making my test crossbow, I had also forged Camicazi's gift for letting me lodge Astrid and Ruffnut into her room that night where everything went wrong. I hid it

amongst the various crossbow pieces of equipment by deciding to spend much of the day designing spare parts, which also served an ulterior purpose. When Alvin had me taken back to the cell, I had requested that the girl steal her own present right from Alvin's nose, which she delighted in. It was not a mere sword or a weapon, rather it was something better suited for Camicazi's unique career choice. Aside from that, I figured it would help her slip in and out of her jail cell by making it clear she was still there.

* * *

><p>Thor help me. I am training a dragon. Hiccup has clearly lost his mind, assuming he had it to begin, with for asking me to do this. Worse yet, whatever madness that had infected Hiccup had already gotten into me as well. I was agreeing to go along with his stupid plan. I wouldn't have done it if it weren't for the fact that Camicazi had promised to return me my axe as soon as she could. I hated the dragon, I really did, but... I wanted my axe more. I shuddered at the thought of what Alvin would do to it the more he held it in his hands. If I had to go teach a dragon a how to punch and kick a little, then so be it.<p>

Said dragon charged at me while, I was in a ready stance. I punched him hard toppling him down. I might have agreed to do it, but that did not mean that I couldn't make this as painful as possible for the beast. He groaned a bit as he clutched his side and came up.

Right now that dragon was the only one left in this prison cell with me. Fishlegs and Hiccup were off doing wild and crazy experiments for Alvin's sake; Camicazi had snuck out of the cell, off on whatever plans Hiccup had told her to do. I would have gone with her, but she locked the door on me and disappeared off into the caverns. Any guards that wandered close to our cell however would believe that she was still inside sleeping.

Hiccup had apparently seen to it to make a sort of mannequin of some sort. Built out of a random collection of small metal rods that can be easily put together to form the rough outline of a human of my (and because we were so alike physical, Camicazi's as well) height and build. All the Bog Burglar had to do was put her clothes on it and hide it in a manner that disguised the decoy.

Granted, that led me back to the fact that I had only one activity open to me on the days Fishlegs would be with Hiccup. I was to train a dragon in hand to hand combat. "I can't believe I am saying this, but you're just as clumsy as Hiccup, maybe worse" I said as I knocked the dragon down on his rear for the fifth time this minute. "It's like you have two left feet."

"I used to have two left feet up until recently," he complained as he got up and went back into that awkward pose the dragon thought was a combat stance. "So what did I do wrong this time?" I had to admit Toothless at least was willing to go through this, despite the fact we both held a mutual distrust of each other.

Though the dragon's balance had improved significantly in the past two days, he still lacked the proper coordination of using his hands and feet effectively. I adjusted his stance carefully. "Your stance needs work. You're distributing all of your weight too your left, causing you to lose balance the moment I trip that side. Aside from

that, you also keep forgetting you do not have claws anymore."

He frowned at me, but complied. "Yes, teacher," he said with a practiced tone. Something told me that he was used to physical training before. Maybe dragons had a sort of warrior training analogue in their culture maybe?

It didn't matter, I had to whip him into shape. I threw a punch at him. He dodged it by throwing his whole body to his left, barely slipping past the fist. I followed it up by performing a leg sweep on his left leg, as all of his weight had been forced on it. It would have sent him toppling yet again on the ground if he had not expected it and blocked my sweep with an arm. He could have retaliated with a counter attack, but the thought must not have occurred to him or that he believed he lacked the skill to pull it off yet.

Taking initiative, I launched another attack two fists, one after the other. He had barely enough time to block one, but the second went around his defenses and into his guts. The punch caused him to stagger a bit, but he still held his ground. "You're improving, I have to do more to hit you than before to knock you down."

"I can do better than that," he said as he lobbed a fist at me, properly remembering to keep the palm closed. I expected this and he fell for my trap. I ducked underneath the punch and right as the arm went over my head, I spun around and grabbed hold of his arm. Then I used his own force and momentum against him by throwing him over my head, back first into the floor. "Ow" he groaned.

"I think we've had enough combat practice for now, don't you think?" I had to pity him a little. Night Furies were absurdly powerful and strong dragons, now however, Toothless was just an average boy by any standards. Still, he deserved it, how much cattle had been lost because of him?

"No, I have to keep fighting. Keep getting stronger," he said.

"Why? You'll only destroy yourself if you do not take a break every now and again." _Not that I would mourn it._

"I know," he replied. "I just want to feel like me, again." I blinked at his statement, understanding that the dragon had been a boy for three days by now. He was feeling longing.

"You like fighting?" I asked him.

"Yes, well, not really, but this is something familiar to me. It is what I did my role. I was raised to be a warrior," he said.

"Well I guess the same goes for all of us then. All of us, even Hiccup to some extent, were raised to be warriors. We just never finished our training"

"That applies to me as well." said the dragon. "I was but a Squire when I was changed."

"What's a Squire?" I could probably pry him for information. Maybe figure out something that could be useful after we get out of this rotten hellhole.

"A junior Knight in training?" That did not solve my question. "It's just what we call our dedicated warriors." I suppose that was sufficient though.

Still, it was strange thinking that the dragon before me was a warrior in training, just as I was. It did not bear thinking about. He was not someone I should associate myself with for long and I only bothered teaching him how to fight because it would help Hiccup's mad escape plan. I lobbed a fist at him, right into face. He dodged it any ducked away into a crouching position.

"Hey, what was that for?"

"New lesson, never let your guard down. Especially when you still ask to fight." He leapt at me, on what I now realized was a developed reflex being attempted at a different form. We fought for at least an hour more, before deciding to take a break.

Despite his clumsiness in this new body of his, I did see that he had stamina, enough to keep going as long as I had. He was inspecting the bruises and injuries his body had obtained. I smiled, enjoying the rush of a productive afternoon's training session. The dragon was licking his wounds, both literally and figuratively. It was gross, but I reminded myself that he was not really a person. He groaned in pain, but overall, I did not think I hurt him, much. He did attempt to harm me several times, but mostly, I got away with a few bruises. He looked at me with an expression of amusement and enjoyment on his face. "Thank you" Astrid." he said as he bowed his head.

The statement shocked me. I was being thanked by a dragon. My mouth however decided to go ask a question without me thinking about it. "For what?"

"For letting me know, that I can still be a warrior, that I can still fight. I really needed it. Are you okay?" He pointed to my face, a gesture which he had only recently learned of.

I must have really looked odd. How could I not? I had just received a _thank you_ from a dragon. "It's nothing," I lied as a recollected myself. _Do not show weakness to a dragon, they are the enemy._

He gave me an inquisitive look and told me, "Did I offend you?"

"No, you didn't!" I exclaimed. Thor help me _even more_. I am being embarrassed at talking with a dragon. "I was just not expecting it."

"So, it's because I am a dragon," he stated with understanding, not asking a question.

I nodded. "Sorry," Now I was apologizing to a dragon. The whole Hofferson family line would disown me if they ever found out. At this point, I would just as well disown myself. "This is just odd for me is all. I accept your thank you."

Toothless nodded in reply. "Would you like to talk about something else?"

"What would we talk about?" Most of what we do is talking, but that's

what happens when you are forced to spend time with someone else against their will.

"How about Hiccup?" he said.

"Why Hiccup?"

"I'm curious about himâ€¦ I would like to know more about the one who shot me down." That made sense. If I ended up turning into a dragon, I would like to know as much as I can about the one who transformed me.

"No!"

"Why not? Everyone else pretty much tells me things." He was right, everyone else was more than willing to share information. Camicazi did not even seem to care he was a dragon, Fishlegs asked things in return, more fascinated with a dragon that spoke Norse than afraid.

"I'm not everyone else. I don't trust you."

"I'm not going to stop until you give in." He said with a smirk. He was right about that.

"And I could keep punching you until you stop."

"In which case, I still benefit. I get better at dodging those punches of yours."

"Fine, but after this, you stay silent and don't bother me for a few hours, got it?"

The dragon nodded. "With your honest opinions?" I nodded. So, I was making a bargain with a dragon. This must be some sort of fairy tale. "So, what do you think about him? I heard he was a terrible warrior, yet how was he able to shoot me down?"

"He's okay, I guess." I said. "Runt of a Viking and barely has the strength to do anything worthwhile, but he at least tries to make up for it." With disastrous consequences for failure.

"How?"

"He took up smithing in hope to make weapons to help make up for the fact that he was soâ€¦ Hiccup." I would also admit, that some of his ideas were actually pretty inventive or perhaps even admirableâ€¦ if it were not for the fact that most of his inventions tended to fail at the worst possible times. Thankfully, that did not apply to the things he made that were more conventional like axes or spears.

"And he turned toâ€¦ he called it sorcery, recently. All to bring me downâ€¦ too right?"

"Yeah," I said. "A lot of Hiccup's ideas tend to backfire all of the time." He had just been caught up in the latest.

Toothless was nodding. "Hiccup said that I would be learning to both of those things along side of him tomorrow. That's what he wants me there with him for right?" I nodded, believing that was to be the

case. "What do you think it would be like?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, you'll be the one to find out."

"Am I interrupting something?" said a voice. We both turned and found Camicazi unlocking the prison doors and entering inside only to lock it from the outside. I was glad she returned, I finally had someone other than the dragon to keep me company.

"You're back."

"Yup, and I've got some gifts," the girl said as she held a bag. Inside I saw something delighted me immensely.

"My axe!" I muttered. It was good to have my axe back from Alvin. As soon as I went home, I was going to polish and sharpen it with that deluxe axe care kit I received from Snoggletog last year from someone who decided to remain anonymous, though I had a feeling a certain Chief's son might have been responsible. Of course, now that I meant I had to actually train that dragon. _This better not backfire on us, Hiccup._

"And some other things, nicked a few daggers from the Outcast armories. They won't miss them." She handed a dagger from the bag to the dragon, who took it, clearly not understanding what he was to do with it.

"So what's so important about this?" the dragon asked.

"Now, you really learn how to fight." I said as I backed away from the group, to the opposite side of the jail cell. "Camicazi, mind taking over for me for now? I need a break." Camicazi smiled a little, enthusiastic. I just held my axe close to my chest, thinking. Would making all of these compromises I made today, for a dragon be worth it?

* * *

><p>Last night was disappointing. By the time everyone had returned in time for supper, everyone, including myself, was drained from a very active day. There was little done other than giving a few words and turning in for the night. I hated my new sleep schedule, I much preferred the moonlight over the sunlight, but it was necessary to change my sleeping times.<p>

"Hey, have you heard?"

My body may have battered by Astrid's melee combat training, but I still walked with pride alongside Hiccup. The practice knife fighting I had endured from the Viking warrior had shown me that I was horrid with the knife. I was not disappointed, as close combat was never something I relied on much when I had been with the Flight. I was trained for ranged combat using the Breath and flight, something that this body was poorly equipped for. And Hiccup had promised me a worthy substitute to one of those things before he would work on restoring me.

"Heard what?"

I walked beside him, examining our surroundings as we were led by the

Outcast warriors to wherever it was Hiccup worked. This man, this Alvin held many of my Kin up in metal cages, preventing them from escaping or burning through them. I did not know why Hiccup wanted to release these prisoners, both Herd and Kin alike, but it was his designs, his plans. I could not care less what happened to them, they were just commoners, after all. But even then, they still made noise, still spoke in hushed tones. I was fortunate I still understood their voices. Nothing would have been worse.

"I heard that the King's new Night Fury had died. Heard it from the King himself before I got captured this morning."

About me. As soon as that unseen Kin spoke those words, the room exploded into a chorus of shouts and cries. _"Good riddance." "What are you talking about, he could have been the greatest of us." "He should have been born a Terror." _And many, many more shouts

Correction, this was worse. The King had declared me dead. If had to regain my place in the Nest in my Flight, I would have to undo thisâ€¦ whatever it is affecting me. I was dead to my Kin.

_"They never found the body. I believe he is still alive." _I turned towards the source of that voice, looking at the familiar face of a Gronckle, with faded bronze scales, torn up wings. His eyes, gazed upon me as I did that. _"I know we will find him." _The confidence in his voice was unnerving me.

"Toothless, you okay?" Hiccup stated.

"These Herd will keep us locked in."

"It's nothing," I assured Hiccup and continued walking along side me. I should not be so intimidated by the gossip of mere commoners, I was a Squire after allâ€¦ albeit a pronounced dead squire, but a warrior and Knight-in-training nonetheless.

We arrived at our destination soon enough. We were locked inside my our Outcast escorts, leaving me and Hiccup the privacy we needed. "So, what was that about? You looked veryâ€¦ uncomfortable there."

"Oh nothing, just overhearing a conversation about me being dead."

"What? That's actually pretty interesting," Hiccup stated. Since yesterday, Hiccup added a pair of gloves to disguise his hands and moved on to wearing much larger boots to conceal his feet. "You can understand your old language on top of learning Norse, maybe it has to do with the means used to transform you. Say what's the dragon language called?"

"My Kin do not have a name for it and as far as I know, every dragon on the sphere of the world speaks the same tongueâ€¦ So I do not think there was ever a need to name it." I stated.

"The world is round?" Hiccup stated grabbing a, he called it a 'pin', if I was not mistaken and wrote something down on a book. To me, it resembled nothing other than the scratching of a hen, yet to Hiccup those markings meant something more valuable. My attempts of writing

had resulted in me drawing circle that Hiccup said had no meaning. I thought I was perfectly making my intentions clear, but I did not realize I was not. "I always thought the world was flat. How do dragons know it's round?"

"I don't really know." I admitted. "That's just what I had been taught. According to a legend the bards sing from time to time, there was this dragon named Sun Chaser, who earned his name by chasing after the sun for every day of his life. The tale says that he was a member of the Kin who came from a distant land. Most everyone says he resembled a snake with golden scales and flew without wings but had a thousand arms."

Hiccup spent some time writing down my words, before stating. "Go on."

"According to the story, Sun Chaser was a dragon who fell in love with the Sun and sought to unravel all of its mysteries. He traveled the globe and met many of the Kin and yet declared that all spoke the same language. After many years of following the Sun's path, he noticed that there were places that experienced longer or shorter days and nights depending on where they were and on different times of the year.

"According to the tale, some places experienced even days and even nights through the year while others experienced six months of day and six months of night. I don't know how, but he got it in the head the earth was shaped as a sphere after that and started telling any Kin that he met that the Earth was round in the same way the Moon and Sun were round."

"That's amazing, well not really relevant to us right now, but rather insightful." Hiccup stated as he closed the book. "You should tell Fishlegs about it, he'd be very interested in it."

"I'll bet." After the initial meeting, Fishlegs started becoming more amiable towards me when he had learned I knew plenty of things about dragons. Right now, I assumed he was going through training with Astrid as I had yesterday. According to him, it deserved "changing the Intelligence rating of Night Furies to at least a twenty five" whatever that means. I knew each of the words, but the context the words were in was alien to me. "Personally, I don't think there ever was a Sun Chaser. The story is just too ridiculous to be true."

"Like the Kin turning into the Herd?" Hiccup countered using the words I used to describe dragons and humans respectively.

"That's possible with enough power!" I protested. "Anyways, you did not bring me here to tell stories did you?"

"No, I brought you here for other purposes." He held up the shape of a familiar weapon, one that has haunted my dreams in the past days. I wonder if the Herd had an understanding of what irony was. "First we'll be testing these crossbows for right now then, we'll start to making improvements and new parts for them."

It unnerved me slightly when he gave me a weapon similar to the one that resulted in the King declaring me dead. Although, this might have been what the boy was referring to earlier. "I don't think it's

a good idea."

"Come on. You gotta try." Hiccup grabbed another crossbow, one that seemed to be slightly different from the one I used, and aimed it right at a target, a sort of disc with different circles of color, marked at the opposite end of the room. There were arrows there from yesterday. I tried to do as he did, copying his stance, holding the weapon close to my face.

"Look through that prop on the top that tells you roughly where the bow would hit if there's no wind in the way." I held my breath and slowly relaxed my hands.

"Now, pull the trigger." He said as he launched the arrow and hit the target straight into the center of the red circle. At the same time, Hiccup pulled back a 'level', I think that's what it was, causing the crossbow to quickly prepare for what I assumed to be another shot. "Pull the lever to reload and fire again." He repeated this a few more times, each time striking the red mark that I assumed was the goal, before running out of ammunition. "Now you try."

I did as was asked, firing four arrow in quick succession, each hitting a different part of the target, none of them hitting the red. "I'm not very good at this am I?" While I had enjoyed the practice I had gained from Astrid the other day, using weapons was still so unfamiliar to me that I likely passed for being a poor warrior.

"You're doing fine," Hiccup reassured me. "You just need more practice at this. Actuallyâ€¦ I may have an ideaâ€¦ Try changing your hands."

"My hands?" Currently, I held the trigger end of the weapon with my right hand. What did what hand I use matter for anything?

"Yeah, some people, like me, are better using their left over their right."

"But you used your right hand to aim the crossbow."

"I know, but that's only because I had tooâ€¦ Left hand dominant people are frowned upon because people think it's a curse."

I frowned at that. "Is it?" I casually inverted my hands and my stance, not really noticing any difference in my aiming ability.

"I don't believe it isâ€¦ but that does not stop people from saying that it is." I agreed with that. Apparently, Vikings had such silly beliefs. First they say that the world was not round and now they say that left handed people are cursedâ€¦ Then again, wasn't I cursed into being human?

I held my breath and steadied my hands. I shot the last bolt. I hit the center of the red target. "Nice shot, bud. Okay, so I'll show you how to reload, then I'll give you some exercises that would help me out on the forge, maybe you can do some metal workâ€¦" Hiccup was ecstatic and rambling.

I smirked at that applause It might have been luck that had made me succeed, but right now, I did not care. I finally had progress. I

decided I liked this weapon Hiccup had given me. With practice, I knew I could shoot further and further targets. It was not the same thing as using the Breath to level buildings, but I could see that crossbows had their own strength their own uses. I would be a fool to notice the potential in these weapons.

Then I realized something much more important, "Wait, did you just call me 'bud'?" As in refering to me as though I were his friend.

"Uh, yeah," Hiccup admitted.

"Why?" It wasn't as though we were friends or anything. At best, we were allies of convenience. He shot me down and taken away my true form, all we was doing was correcting that mistake and I was simply obligated to work alongside him until it was over. Once he was done fixing that, we would go on our separate ways.

"I just felt it would be appropriate," Hiccup stated. "I did not know it would upset you so much, is there a reason I can't call you 'bud'?"

"Well, no, not really," I admitted. Now that I thought about it, the actions. "Why did you feel it would be appropriate."

Hiccup shrugged. "I was just thinking, maybe it would be nice to have you for a friend." Surely, that can't have been all that. Before, the Kin would have sought me out because of my status as the child of a Flight Commander and recently, as an aspiring Squire and future Knight. Some sought me as a companion, other sought me as someone they would like to serve. But then I realized that, none of the Vikings, knew about that part of my life. To them, I was just a Night Fury who ended up turning into a boy.

Camicazi had invited me to play that game the other day. Fishlegs was willing to talk to me about the things that interested him, mostly dragons and plant life. Hiccup was going to extra mile and teaching me about things I had no real need to know, such as boats and writing. Only Astrid still felt that we were 'allies of convenience' and given how casually we talked about things yesterday, that was bound to change eventually. "You would want to be me to be your friend?" I asked him, still incredulous.

"Yeah, I don't exactly very many." Hiccup's face turned into a smile. "So, would you?"

"Let me think about itâ€|" Hiccup's request was genuine. There were no ulterior motives that I could see. I had very little that I could offer him and he could offer me nearly anything. I was powerless and at his mercy. He had nothing to gain from befriending me and yet he still offered it anyways. The fact I was even considering his offer would force a healer to declare a new type of illness that affected the mind.

It might have been nice, the more I thought about it. I wouldn't mind learning more about the world of humans, especially if Hiccup was the one doing the teaching. It was fascinating to see the things the Herd had that the Kin did not. And I was very sure that Hiccup would be interested to learn more about the Kin, given how intently he listened to the story of Sun Chaser. He was also very kind and

someone I felt I could trust, given how hard he worked. The main problem was our kinds were mortal enemies and both of us wanted to return to our true forms. "I would like it, I really would." I admitted. "But you wish to become wholly human again and I want to return to my Kinâ€¦ I don't think we could remain friend should we succeed in returning us, not with our kinds regarding each other as animals to be slaughtered."

"I'm aware," Hiccup said. "Do you think it would be possible to broker a peace between my Tribe and all dragons?" Tribe, I understood meant a similar meaning to Flight, but was more inclusive and more autonomous.

"No," I replied. "Most of the Kin don't even think the Herd speak a language."

"Most of dragons haven't been turned human," Hiccup stated. "I don't suppose there's a leader that we could try talking to into negotiations, that King you mentioned earlier. I figure that since someone has to lead the dragon raids, he might be it." I knew he was referring to our Hunts.

I considered that for a moment. The King, might be willing to broker a deal with Hiccup's people. That way, I did not have to worry about befriending him. In fact, I could easily position myself as a diplomat in that case. In those conditions, I could easily maintain Hiccup's offer of friendship and in so doing, I could offer him something in return. "Assuming we could speak to him somehow, that's all we have to do."

"So, assuming, that we can do that, would you like to be my friend?"

"Yes, I would."

"Okay, so before Alvin shows up and sees that I'm stalling for time, let me show you how to work a hammer on the forge."

* * *

><p>We arrived home a full two days after departing Fort Sinister. The sky was covered by a haze of dark clouds, giving the air a depressing gloom. To think that so much had happened to us all in the span of a week. It was very clear that the gods did not favor us Hooligans right now. Thankfully, we Hooligans were used to the world being against us. We were Vikings after all.<p>

"The warriors have returned!" "Chief Stoic has back!" I heard voices shouting from far away. They obviously did not expect us to return to so soon and we had not sent any messages ahead. Despite that a crowd began gathering as soon as the first shouts were heard. Everyone wanted to know what had happened. Everyone wanted to know if a loved one was going to be feasting in the Great Hall or in Valhalla tonight.

As we approached closer, I saw a welcome face greet me at the docks. Gobber with his peg-leg and hooked hand was the reassurance I needed. At least I had someone still waiting for me to come back home. "Stoick, we've got a problem!"

The sailors onboard my ship moored us on the dock as fast as we could. I saw Gobber holding a piece of paper in his hands, a letter I assumed. "What is it Gobber?"

"Alvin's got Hiccup! We received the message this morning." My best friend handed me the letter and I read it in full.

To that Pitiful Chief

I have your precious son on my island, plus two of his friends. If you ever want to keep your son alive, meet me on my island and we can discuss the terms. If you're feeling especially generous, maybe, just maybe I would let you hear from him again. I don't think you could ever afford the price to buy him his freedom. I intend to keep him my prisoner for a long, long time.

Alvin, the Treacherous.

My heart broke in two separate ways. On the one hand I now knew my son was alive. On the other, I knew he was in the clutches of that most hated enemy of mine. And given that Thuggory had said that Ingerman boy, the Hofferson girl, and Bertha's child were with Hiccup, it was clear to who that rat was referring to when he meant 'two friends'.

If I had the manpower and if I still had most of fleet, I would lay siege on Outcast Island to take my son back. Then I would sink the island and lock Alvin in a coffin and send that sinking to the bottom of the sea.

But I did not have the resources available to me anymore. My men were wounded and tired from fighting; my half of my fleet was sunk in Oswald's harbor, waiting to be turned into cheap housing; and I myself knew that it would be so simple for Alvin to deny me my victory at the last moment. It would be too foolish for me to engage battle now.

I looked at one of the barrels of food that Oswald had sent us. I had embarked on this mad and suicidal farce for the first place because I felt that putting the needs of my village and the law would be the best course of action. Now all it did was now result in an awful choice. Did I put the needs of the village before my own? My fathers and grandfathers would never have hesitated at this decision, but at the same time I was not my fathers.

I just wanted my son back. I had just noticed that the villagers and the sailors were all standing around, waiting for orders. Many of them were quite relived Hiccup was no longer at Berk, but at the same time, many of them, more than I had ever anticipated, showed concern on their faces. All of them were waiting on my orders. "Everyone disembark, for now. I won't be making any decisions on an empty stomach." This caused the crowd to disperse and the sailors and Viking warriors to leave their boats. "Gobber, take me to Gothi. I need her advice."

Gothi was the village elder, one of the oldest living residents on Berk. Life had been so hard on her that she had shrunken down into a tiny figure of the woman she once was. But for her trouble, she held much wisdom in these manners. Right now, I sat in her cottage that overlooked the entity of Berk. I had no idea why she desired to live

so high up when she was an old and frail woman, but there was no questioning her decisions.

I held a cup of tea that she had brewed to the occasion, long before my ship was close enough to be seen from the pier. The fact she had apparently been expecting us scared me a little inside. Her ability to predict things scared me almost as much as the rumors of the various ways she could predict death. But that's how it went with people who tended to delve into mysticism and sorcery. What they knew tended to scare me. "Gothi, I need your help."

Were he still alive, I would have instead requested help from my father-in-law. Gothi, because of her age, was rendered unable to speak loudly or often on her own, so she tended to write in the dirt when she could. Though I could read, I had difficulty in understanding the elder's handwriting, Gobber was better at reading and interpreting those runes than I was. "She says she knows it's about your son." I nodded. _That was pretty creepy. _She drew more lines for Gobber to read. "She asks, 'How far are you willing to go to have him returned to you?'"

"I wish I could go as far as I could go, but I have a responsibility to the Tribe as its Chief," That was the one downside to my job. No matter what I did, I had to prioritize my time between my duties to the village and my child.

"She says, 'As Chief, you're responsible for maintaining and protecting our future. Though few believe in him, Hiccup is our future and you have a duty to protect him.'"

That news relieved me somewhat, making my choice clearer. If the elder said it was fine, then I would have little problem in going to meet Alvin to do what I can to save my son. I still didn't know whether or not I preferred it to be on the field of battle or on the meeting table, but given that he held my son captive, I had to make sure that Alvin did not have his weapon drawn. "Thank you, Gothi, that's the kind of thing I was hoping to hear."

Gothi then continued writing. "She says, 'However, no matter how this conflict will be resolved, Hiccup will be changed, are you still prepared to accept him as your son?'"

Alvin was known to be one of the most feared men in the Archipelago, despite the small size of his Tribe. I had no doubt that on his island, Hiccup would be experiencing things that I doubted I could truly prepare him for. Being captured and held hostage can truly change a man, especially in such horrid condition. Once one had freedom taken away and once hopelessness had made it into the pit of the heart, that kind of experience could be damaging if done for a long enough time. "I just want my son back, Gothi. No matter what happens to him, I'll welcome him home with open arms."

* * *

><p>Snotlout may be slightly OoC in this chapter than any other. This is due to how difficult it is for me to find a canon source that does not have him overconfident over everything. Granted, after doing some thinking and looking at his family issues plus how he behaved towards people who were bigger and scarier than him such as Alvin, I realize he is a guy who is used to being a bully, being

large and in charge. And outside of that place— well, he tends to crack like an egg. Which oddly enough kind of gets proven in a recent episode of Defenders of Berk.

****Hiccup's repeating crossbows are based on the Chinese repeating crossbow, statistically at least.****

****Also, now you get to see more about the method I plan to have Hiccup use to transform. Some of you may already know what it is because I let it slip too early somewhere in a PM or something.****

****Transformation stories existed as old as time. _Every_ culture has them and well, I decided that Hiccup, being the guy that he is would obviously know of them. So I decided to reference them in general.****

****Because the terms do not exist in setting, I will have to explain it here. Have any of you ever seen those Christmas light wireframe animals? Camicazi effectively got those, sans lights as a present from Hiccup. ****

****I love Mythology, I really do. Sun Chaser is a thought I had about what dragons would know and not know and believe in and how they would justify it without writing or tool use. Dragons as a culture would have their own legends to explain their beliefs. And yes, he's an Asian dragon breed. As for whether or not if it's true or not, that's for you to decide.****

****One of the things mind control operating Red Deaths do is remove the possibility of negotiation from the story. I think it would be infinitely more interesting to explore the possibility of what could happen if the Red Death can be reasoned with and spoken to. ****

6. Chapter 6

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****Since a guest has brought up an interesting point and valid argument over some of the issues I had in chapter 5, I edited parts of it. So thank you anonymous reviewer who probably deliberately misspelled "Guest".****

****I would also like to congratulate Thorborn on being my official beta reader.****

****I hope you folks enjoy the story.****

*** * ***

><p>My plans were useless. Just as I was useless. I failed them, again. Alvin had all along known I was deceiving him and intentionally let me plot my own demise just so that he could crush my hope. Now, I was alone, separated from everyone so that Alvin could dole out personalized punishments. I did not know their fates, but now I was strapped to a table by chains and bereft of all of my clothing, exposing the random assortments of scale, claws, and my eye that I had worked so meticulously to conceal.<p>

I struggled uselessly against my chains, but even with my increased strength that was useless to me.

Weeks of planning, all for nothing.

"Hiccup," the tall Outcast said a gleam of satisfaction in his eye. "We had a deal. You thought you could double-cross ol' Alvin the Trecherous did you?"

I shivered, but tried to focus myself. I spat at him. "Like anyone would be stupid enough to trust a name like yours. Maybe if you were Alvin the Poor-but-Honest-Farmerâ€|"

He sneered me. "Hmph, you got some fight left in you. I bet you're wondering what kind of punishment you'll be getting."

"What kind of punishment are you going to inflict upon me?" I played his little game.

Alvin held up a little sewing needle and twirled it around deftly between his fingers. You know, for a brutish thug of a man, Alvin had nimble fingers. "The thing you've been dreading most. Change." My heart skipped a beat and my blood ran ice cold. Alvin now knew that every time I got injured my body rapidly recovered. "And I'm going to be giving that to you, one pinprick at a timeâ€|" I rattled my chains again but to no avail.

"Wait, what about the ransom?" Please, oh please. Thor, Odin, I would love to be held hostage and not tortured by Alvin the Treacherous.

"Oh, don't worry about that, I'm sure your dad loves you enough to pay for you no matter how much of a dragon you are."

Alvin stood over me, needle and handle and jabbed my untransformed right hand. It hurt, but not as much as the incident with the repeater. I looked at my palm, seeing the blood welling up. It healed very quickly, leaving behind the usual small coat of black scale of a Night Fury. Alvin did it again, several times, each time, I was helpless to stop him as he constantly punctured the skin on my defenseless hand. He fed off of my screams and groans of pain. I wept at little as I tried to see my hand turn into a vicious claw that was oversized and poorly fit on my small body.

Then suddenly the needle broke in half, much to my delight. Alvin hurriedly threw it away, then pulled a whole box seemingly from out of nowhere. My heart sake as he drew multiple needles from the box. I was turned into a human-gradually becoming dragon pincushion. Alvin changed a large portion of my lower body, including both of my legs and the whole of my right arm. At this point, I was more dragon than boy. "Please, make it stop, Alvin," I cried tears. I just wanted it to be over. I cursed my powerful healing ability for making it hard for me to pass out or die from blood loss or injury. It would have been so much easier if that was the case. Then I realized my mistake. I had asked for mercy from _Alvin the Treacherous._

"I've just about had enough of your whining," the Outcast Chief said as he pulled a very old looking cooking pot, inscribed with runes and sigils of arcane working. "Let us see what happens now." Alvin forced

my mouth open by grabbing my lower jaw and I was made to drink the orange metallic look liquid that had gotten me into this mess. I choked on the liquid and tried to keep myself from swallowing it, but the force, the heat, and the fact I was having a hard time breathing had ultimately make myself swallow it gulp by gulp.

Alvin withdrew once the pot was empty and just threw it away when its use was finished. "Alvin!" I coughed out. I did not know what happened when to someone if they took a second dose of the potion, but against my will, I would find out. My throat was changing, I could feel it warping and reshaping and in only a few moments, the feeling subsided. "Alvin," I said again. This time instead of words, it came out as an unintelligible roar except I understood it. The whole racial language thing dragons had was so confusing on how it worked.

"Alvin!" I heard a voice boom out. Heavy footsteps told me someone was approaching and I could not turn and see the source. However the voice was a welcome sound as it sounded utterly disgusted and angry at the Outcast Chieftain. "I've got your payment, now leave us alone." It was my father, coming to save me. I thanked the All-Father.

Alvin backed away, from me to greet my father, who had just come into view. "Stoic," Alvin said with enough cheer and a smile wide enough to make my skin and scales crawl. "I take it you have enough to buy back your, son."

"I have no son," I heard my father say. My heart broke, the words cut like a knife. I was no longer his son? Then why did my father buy me back? "Your payment is outside, you can check for yourself if it is enough, now leave us."

Alvin just smiled at that and went off on his way, leaving me alone with my former father. "Such a shame, Savage was thinking, I'd make quite a sight riding on him." The idea of Alvin riding on top of me was scarier than the needles.

"Dad," I tried to say, only for it to come out as a roar only I could understand. I wept. My father just looked at me with a cold disdain that I had never seen him give me before. Even in all of the years I had been Hiccup the Useless, the Viking without a chance, never once did I ever see my father hate me as he did right now. All because I was a dragon.

"You were my son, but you've thrown your lot with them." He said with menace. Like most Vikings, he had lost many a loved one to dragons over the years, so it was a soft spot for him. "You were always different, everyone knew that and I loved you despite all that. And this is how you repay me! You're no son of mine, you're one of the enemy now." My father went out of my field of vision. I did not know what he was doing, but I could hear the clanging and shuffling of wood.

"What're you going to do with me?" I roared in my new language. He did not seem to understand me, but I knew that I would receive my answer soon enough. I could see my father better now, moving back and forth, placing and piling wood around the table I was strapped to. I hoped being partly a dragon made me relatively fire proof. Being burned to death was not a sensation I would like to know. On the

other hand, I doubted it would be as bad as the knife my father stabbed through my metaphysical heart. Maybe dying would have been better.

"And like an enemy," my father said, a torch in his hand. "I will destroy you." He threw the torch at me, setting the wood and the table on fire.

Working as a blacksmith by trade, I had experience with getting burned. Usually it was my own fault and usually, it wasn't too bad as I had safety equipment preventing me from getting singed too badly. This on the other hand, hurt more than anything else I ever experienced. It hurt, a lot. The fire ate at my flesh, like school of those mythological piranha I heard stories about. Unfortunately, the fire did not turn me into the ash and cinders that I had hoped it would. Instead of turning me into a shriveled up old mess, I grew bigger. Everything about me grew larger.

The table could no longer support by no longer ninety pound weight and collapsed as the fire ate at the supports. That pain was almost a comforting, being more familiar than the sensation of being burned alive, yet not dying. The shackles that held me came undone as my arms grew too large for them to contain. My back hurt, and I knew that I was growing additional appendages, being the wings and tail I would need to fly. In the end, the fire stopped hurting me, becoming an almost pleasant sensation of warmth. The last of my humanity died away along with the fire. I was in body, a dragon, just as I feared would happen.

My father drew a sword. I knew for what purpose. _"No!"_ I roared out, again in the dragon language. I did not want to die, not by his hands, not like this. I might change my inclination later. I keep going back and forth on the whole living and dying thing, since I don't know at this point if it was better to live or die. With my bindings undone, I was free to act. Using instincts I did not even know I had, I whipped my tail at my father's legs and sent him on the ground. _Sorry, dad._

The sword was knocked free from his hands in the fall and it gave a metallic clang as it fell upon the hard stone floor. One look at his face was all I needed to know that I had upset him. My eyes scanned the room for an escape as my father took time to get up. There were no windows or anything, but I did find a door, which must have been the room's only visible entrance. I knew Alvin, the Outcasts, or any Hooligans were likely behind it, but they were all more pleasant than dealing with my father.

I leapt up at the door and used my right hand to try and grab it. I was fortunate that Night Fury palms were still human enough to use doors. The door led me to a large circular room, which must have been Alvin's mess hall. As I had feared, it was stuffed to the brim with dragon killing warriors of all shapes and sizes, including Alvin himself. The Outcast Chief only needed to look at me for a second before he yelled, "Get that dragon!"

I ran through the mess hall by jumping atop one of the large dining tables, as it led me directly to two enormous double doors. Instinctively though awkwardly, I ran atop the table and randomly scattered whatever plates of food and silverware that were place upon in, granting me a slight distraction as Vikings of all sorts tried to

look at me. Being bigger than even my father and a type of dragon known for speed, I moved nimbly, evading swords slashes, axe throws, and other assorted nasty weapon attacks.

I leapt off the table, seeing the exit not very far away. Some Vikings attempted to block the entrance using their bodies with shields raised. Big mistake, they forgot to raise any weapons. The best part about being a dragon, I weighed more than them and I was moving at them at a sprint—or what passed for one. I plowed through them. They all toppled down like a bunch of bowling pins. Strike for Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third.

To my relief, the large doors those Vikings guarded opened to the outside and meaning that my tackle through the door, did not slow down. For the first time in ages, I cheered at the sight of the bright sun after spending weeks toiling in Alvin's dungeon. I ran some more, towards the nearest sighting of blue ocean. Unfortunately, like Berk, Outcast Island was built on top of island cliffs, giving me little more room to run without scaling walls or hunting for ledges. _Maybe I could fly, I have the wings._ Somehow, the idea of flying away into the sunset just thrilled me, finally letting go of the limits that I had been bound by for so long. Even though I did not know where I wanted to travel to, "anywhere except here" was good enough.

Unfortunately, I would never get to try. A sharp pain entered the back of my left knee and extended all the way through the kneecap, sending me sprawling to the ground. I only had a moment's reprieve before another hit my right. My hindlegs failed to respond, the pain so intense that I could only roar and groan in agony. I could feel that that strange bodily process that healed me rapidly try to kick in, but whatever had taken me was also preventing it from completing. I tried to crawl away, using my arms or forelegs, whatever they were called now, to drag me forward, to feebly escape my attackers. My hopes were dashed as my attacker also struck my arms. It was only now that I had the time to realize that my attacker shot arrows through the joints in my limbs and in quick succession. Now, I could see who had taken me down in my peripheral vision.

Toothless walked into my field of vision, crossbow in hand. I really regretted teaching him now. "You took everything away from me, now I am going to do the same to you."

_"Toothless, I am so, so sorry. Please, I beg you, spare me." _I roared in that nameless language. I knew he could understand, since it was his native tongue.

"I am not going to kill you," he said. That did not relieve me in the slightest. "She will."

Then I saw, Astrid approach me, axe in hand. "You're a failure of a Viking, Hiccup. Your plans are always doomed to failure." It was true, I was a failure. Everything I did resulted in failure.

"We would have been fine if it were not for you, I would still be me." I was responsible for that. I shot Toothless down and made him human with a single enchanted arrow.

"Alvin, would never have captured us and held us prisoner." Yes, if I never went after Toothless or Night Furies in the first place, I

would stillâ€¦ wait, hang on. We were all captured, yet why were _they_ here right now? In fact, those two_ hated, _or at this point, disliked, each other, why were they working together?

"It is time we had our revenge." Toothless said. Now that I thought of it more, this whole thing made no sense. I was definitely moving too smoothly and with much better coordination for someone who had just rapidly turned into a dragon after all. I had also been set on fire a little way too quickly when the only fuel was just firewood. If it was oil, maybe I would have burned faster. And well, everyone, Alvin and my father, Toothless and Astrid were way too friendly to their supposed enemies. Only in my dreams would I see something like that. And upon that thought, I realized that the reason I seen those things was because I was in a dream.

"I think I'll keep your head as a trophy," Astrid said as she raised her axe. Then if this was a dream, all I had to do was wake up. "You're just a dragon now." The axe cut off my head, strangely it was painless, maybe it was because I realized it was all an illusion. Or maybe I had gone mad. My eyes saw the world tumble around me as my head descended from the ground.

My last thoughts and the last thing I saw were the dream fakes of Toothless and Astrid. Then everything faded to a bright light.

* * *

><p>Hiccup was groaning awake after a nasty nightmare. Astrid and Toothless had rushed to his side the moment he had started screaming and groaning in illusory pain. I, myself, was not far behind them. Camicazi was the only one not present and that was because she had last minute errands to accomplish before everyone woke up. I wonder if Trader Johann could pick up any books dealing with the dreams, it certainly make for a great read after I finished with that botany book I had ordered. As long as it wasn't all magicky like that book Hiccup had shown me, maybe it would help me stop my own nightmares. I had way too many.<p>

"Hiccup, are you okay?" I heard Astrid call towards my oldest friend.

"I must still be dreamingâ€¦" The son of the Chief said groggily. "You two are still around meâ€¦ With Fishlegs. Hey Fishlegs." He waved his arm like it was a soggy noodle. I waved back. Whatever that dream was, it did not do Hiccup any favors. At the very least, he had woken

"Uh," Toothless stuttered. "Would you like us to get you anything?"

"Maybe some water," Hiccup said absent mindedly. At that statement, both Toothless _and _Astrid left the two of us alone. We both looked at run towards a feeding trough with a set of cups Alvin had left for us to serve as our daily water supply. More than you would expect to offer a few prisoners, but it was clean.

I could see Hiccup grab his head with one of his nearly always gloved hands to try and settle what must have been dizziness. Though he did not say it, I could figure out what his nightmare had been about, there was a slow build up towards it. He had been getting more

unstable every day especially since he had learned that even the slightest injuries caused him to grow scales. More and more, I had seen him shy away from even the smallest of needles, all to avoid harm and further becoming less human. On top of that, was that he had been getting rather paranoid about Alvin finding out our plans and doing worse things to us. So when you have all that and add in some chronic insomnia, it came as no surprise he had a bad dream.

I will readily admit I am a big coward. I can barely stand total darkness for more than five _seconds_ before I break down and weep. But Hiccup? Hiccup was now scared of _everything._ "I don't get why you don't just use one of those arrows that made Toothless human, it would saved you a lot of trouble if you did not have to worry about getting more and more dragon-like. We did make one of them yesterday." Camicazi had pickpocketed dozens and dozens of coins over the past few weeks to get us enough silver to melt down. As most were not pure silver and it took far too long to filter the metals, Camicazi just stole as much as she could to get us the materials we needed. Any coins we rejected were her property. Camicazi had also stolen back the notes I had copied from the book the night of the raid. This allowed Hiccup access to the arcane knowledge granted by the book, despite the thing being on Alvin's body at all times. Needless to say, the Bog Burglar was enjoying being held hostage on Outcast Island since she was stealing everything left and right.

"I know, but I might need the strength and the ability to recover quickly, especially today. I can't risk losing either of those yet." It had been nearly over four weeks since had captured us and Hiccup had declared it almost time for us to plan our escape. "I've been dealing with this for several weeks now, a little more time is not going to hurt anything. Keep it with you, once we're free, you can shoot my foot again." That last part meant to be a joke, but made me uncomfortable, especially since that incident with started Hiccup's descent into madness.

Just then, we had seen Toothless knock Astrid away from the water trough before filling it with water. "Hey! What was that for!?" Astrid yelled.

"I'm getting Hiccup the water he asked," Toothless replied with a smile. I didn't mind Toothless much and he seemed quite nice to everyone, except Astrid who held the same opinion. Mostly we just spoke about what we knew and traded information, especially stuff about dragons. I managed to get my copy of the _Book of Dragons _from Alvin under the guise of using that information for "testing purposes". I could not pass the opportunity up. After all, not even Bork the Bold never got to have a _conversation _with a dragon. For some reason, he was oddly interested in boats, never could figure out why.

"You?" Astrid scoffed as Toothless walked away. Astrid then sent the boy to the ground by shoving him to the ground. The water in the cup spilled out. "You don't exactly have his best interests at heart. Human form or not, you're still a dragon." Astrid filled her own cup and started to rush towards the slowly awakening boy,

"And you do? I seem to recall Hiccup flinching every time you so much as raise your hands." Astrid had to break her old habit of punching everyone whether or not it was appropriate because of Hiccup. Toothless then knocked the cup Astrid held in her hands, returning

the insult from earlier. They were fighting about helping Hiccup, it was just ridiculous. "I will care for him."

"The sad part is, they both have my best interests at heart." Hiccup told me.

"Which typically excluded the people they disliked," I added. Hiccup nodded in silent agreement.

"Take that!" Astrid said to Toothless as she punched the smaller and less melee competent defender. While Toothless was definitely more comfortable moving in his body than he had since he had first changed, he was still a long way off from defeating, the much more martially gifted Astrid. Still, the boy had guts and retaliated by tackling Astrid to the ground.

"Fish, I recommend staying back," Hiccup said as he stepped over there woozily. This then prompted the two to grab their cups and fill them with water once more. They gave them a smile as Hiccup took both of the cups and poured them on top of his head. "Oh, thanks I needed that." I could tell that he did not want to favor one or the other too greatly, else he would alienate the other. With Hiccup stated, the two just went back to fighting again, both of them rather enjoying it.

I did the sane thing and not to get involved with a dragon-turned-human and a Viking shieldmaiden trying to care for a Viking-who-gets-more-dragon-when-hurt. I backed away and let them do whatever they were doing unimpeded. I found Camicazi entering the our little jail cell, holding a jar filled with berries of some sort. The jar was labeled "Deadly Nightshade Berries", one of the ingredients in that strength potion Hiccup brewed. This was the last thing on Hiccup's list of things he wanted to acquire before the escape attempt. The other ingredients were gathered some other time with great ease. With it, he had planned to return Toothless to his true form to grant us more firepower and muscle on our way out.

"Camicazi? You're back early," I told her.

"Oh yeah, guards were drunk tonight. Dead to the world."

"Isn't that fortunate? Might make things easier on us tomorrow, er today."

"So what's happening?" She said as she turned towards the mess involving Hiccup, Astrid, and Toothless. "Ooh, I like watching a good scuffle, what're they fighting on about this time?" In the recent weeks, Astrid and Toothless have made it a habit to get into scuffles every now and again, for the most pointless things. They no longer displayed outright hatred for one another, but they still viewed each other with suspicion. And that tended to break down into minor conflicts.

"They fought over who'd give Hiccup a glass of water. Who does that?" I told her. The scene made no sense whatsoever.

Hiccup had tried to get involved in their scuffle, but to no avail. They were currently wrestling each other on the ground. Surprisingly, Toothless, though terrible at swordplay, seemed to have a much better

job at defending himself from Astrid's attempts to pin the former dragon. "Really? I never would have guessed. It's enjoyable at least," Camicazi said. Then I heard an odd crunching and grinding noise come from her general direction. I saw that the Bog Burglar had a bag from which she drew strange yellowish puff balls from.

"What're those?"

"Oh, these, just something I picked up in the kitchen, would you like some?"

"Sure, I guess." I showed her the palm of my hand and she poured a small helping of the strange food stuffs. I could taste a large amount of butter and salt as I chewed through the strange food. "I wonder how the Outcasts made them, they make an excellent snack."

"Yup, especially when you're watching stuff." Camicazi stated.

Toothless and Astrid were still grappling each other. Astrid was positioned on top of the former dragon, performing a headlock that kept the dragon pinned on his belly. Toothless seemed to be struggling, but did not seem all that frightened or worried. And before it seemed like the dragon could make a comeback, Hiccup heaved a bucket filled with water and poured its contents over the fighting duo. This caused them to break away, and cough out the water. "Thank you for confirming this is not a dream."

Toothless shook himself dry like a dog or animal would. I suppose for all of the dragon's proclaimed intelligence, they still had very animal like behaviors. Astrid simply just wiped her face off using her freehand. "What are you talking about?" Toothless exclaimed.

"And what was that for?" Astrid added.

"Only the real Toothless and Astrid would get into a fight over who gives me a mug of water. And I decided to return the favor." Hiccup stated flatly. Even I could tell this was a bad move. Camicazi decided to chew more of the strange puff balls in quick succession, apparently thrilled.

"You knowâ€¦ Astrid, I think Hiccup could use a little more water." Toothless said as he stood up, a tone of vindictive menace in his voice.

"Yes, Hiccup does look rather parched, don't you agree?" Astrid stood more, placing herself towards Hiccup's rear. This meant that that partially-turned-dragon-boy was now placed in between a slowly approaching former dragon and a Viking shield maiden.

"Uh guysâ€¦" he said sheepishly. Camicazi and I were both going through the back of puff balls at an alarming rate, mostly to relieve tension and distract ourselves. We both did not want to get involved, yet it was too exciting to watch what happened. I had hide my eyes behind one of my hands, hoping that I would not be looking at a particularly nasty scene, but one of eyes still managed to see the whole thing by peeking through the gaps between my fingers.

Fortunately for me, the scene was not something from a grisly, gruesome fairy tale. Astrid pinned down the Viking boy by his clothes and took extra care not to physically harm him. Toothless, grabbing the bucket Hiccup had used prior, emptied the last remnants of water in the trough and poured it over their captive.

Hiccup spat out water from his mouth. "Great, the first time I get you two to do something together, you target me."

"I so love twist endings. Two enemies team up to fight a bigger threat!" Camicazi said between mouthfuls of strange food stuffs. We both laughed at the unusual scene that played out before us.

"The ending was anticlimatic," I added. And well, the whole thing was just ridiculous from the get go. And just like that, the fighting was over and Camicazi's bag of snack foods was emptied.

* * *

><p>I am not above taking vengeance, not even on a friend. Hiccup deserved every ounce of water that I gave him, not the least reason was because he had interrupted my bout with Astrid. Especially since I was about to win. It was only fair that I responded with a little harmless retaliation. Besides, I didn't think Astrid roughed him up enough for him to develop more unwanted scales.<p>

By the time Alvin's men had come to take us in an hour after the fact, Hiccup and I were mostly dry. I gave Hiccup a smug grin as we walked past the dragons leading up to the workshop. The old gronckle from the other day still eyed in particular. I still did not know how I would communicate with him, but if I could, the first thing I would ask was how it known I had become human.

Before long, we were in the familiar little workshop again, which we both knew would be the last time we would enter this place against our wills. And the last time I would be wholly human. Hiccup had already briefed me about the potion and its unusual method of transformation. But if it meant I would have wings again, I told the boy I would set myself on fire to achieve that. Unfortunately, Hiccup shivered away from me when I said that. I could only imagine it had to relate to his nightmare tonight.

"I thought you were my friend you know!" Hiccup said as he was tracing runes onto two cast iron pots. He wanted to make a second potion, just in case someone was mortally wounded, since the potion granted its imbiber supernatural healing abilities. He figured that being part dragon would be preferable to being all dead.

"I am," I replied, not understanding the statement. Did my attacking him along with Astrid cause upset him more than I realized? Though I did not consider the girl my friend, I was able to tell that she was Hiccup's. Granted, something told me there was more to it than that. "Did I offend you?"

"Well, you did attack me with a bucket of water," Hiccup stated.

"Only because you did."

"Because I needed to stop you and Astrid from beating each other up."

"That was between me and _her. _Besides, I was going to win eventually. You had no right to stop us."

"Having a fight over giving someone a cup full of water has to be the dumbest thing to have a fight about. And Astrid had you pinned to the ground with a headlock, really hard to escape that." I scoffed at his statement, I had at least a few avenues to break that hold and I knew it.

While Hiccup was working on the potions, I decided to spend as much time possible working on the forge, since I decided I liked the activity. Twisting earth with fire and water into a new form was appealing. Though molten metal resembled fresh Gronckle vomit, it possessed great potential if harnessed properly.

I had always seen fire as a force of destruction, a force created through the Breath meant to be a weapon. Now however, I saw fire with different eyes, literally and figuratively. The coal and wood powered furnace I had seen did not destroy, but create. With the right knowledge and the right materials, it became possible to make something new. Over the past moon, I had assisted Hiccup in making weapons, each growing more sophisticated and more powerful with each day.

Like the Kin, the Herd drew power from fire, but they did so on their own terms. And I wanted that power for myself. I was nowhere near Hiccup's skill level, but I was at least good enough to forge a decent sword without aid. I did not know of the chances I would continue blacksmithing when I was back in the King's service, but I would resolve to bring it back along with me. Though I had yet to make a kill to silence my detractors, I would not be returning home with an empty mouth. It would be all of the proof I needed to convince the Kin that the Herd were better as servants than as enemies.

On any other day, I would have made simple parts for machinery. Right now, I was just forging a simple knife, something to give me a little excersize. Hiccup, Fishlegs and I made plenty of weapons in the past moon, but despite that, the workshop was never full. The Outcasts entered in every morning to take our production. Though they only succeeded in taking half of the things we made. Every night, Camicazi would break in and spirit half of the weapons someplace else. I did now know where.

The only weapon neither Camicazi nor the Outcasts decided to take were the three barrels of Zibbleback firegas that Hiccup, Fishlegs, I had had spend a few days building a special machine which the others called a 'pump' to extract it from an unconscious dragon. Hiccup had claimed to Alvin that he would be making that apparently threw fire and he would have, before deciding the device was too dangerous. Really, all of us would have preferred that the barrels be moved elsewhere, as it was an explosion just waiting to happen, but Alvin had decided to let us keep it in the workshop as a reminder of our failure. Right now, they were as far away from any sources of heat as possible.

I had just about finished my knife around the time Hiccup had

completed his potions. I cooled off the heated metal using water and set it aside for later use. "It's done," he told me.

I gave him a big grin, excited to finally return to my true form. I took one of the cooking pots he gave me. "I think I'm going to miss having hands," I told him. "They have their uses." I opened the lid and saw the bright warm metallic liquid held inside. I didn't drink it, not yet.

"Really?" he asked. "I'm more worried about potential communication issues."

"Why's that? I can understand my Kin just fine. I'm sure I would still be able to understand you."

"Well, Dragonese or Draconicâ€¦" Hiccup had been trying to name the language of the Kin for some time now. These were the two 'best' names. Personally, I would wish it be called the 'Tongue', but humans had to have names for everything it seemed. "Is your native tongue. You spent your whole life learning use so it makes sense you'd retain it. I don't know the same applies to the magically acquired Norse you haveâ€¦"

"Rightâ€¦ Well so before I take drink this, mind explaining to me what the phrase 'Bottom's up' means?" I had heard the others say that phrase every now and again when they took a drink. Usually, before dinner. While many Norse words themselves were perfectly understood by me, I still had trouble understanding certain phrases. I mean I shouldn't take it at face value, but the term was very paradoxical.

"It's just something people say when taking a drinkâ€¦ It refers to well, the fact that when drinking we tilt whatever we're drinking out of to pour the water into our mouth. Hence the term 'Bottom's upâ€¦ The bottom is moved to the top. I don't think dragons have silverware or cups, bottles, or flasks, so they never really had need of a phrase like that." I nodded at his explanation. "So why did you ask?"

"Felt it was appropriate." I stated. "Bottom's up!" I stated as I raised the pot over my head and readied to pour it. Except that I did not have time to pour it. Large hairy hands tore the pot from mine. I felt a kick land on the small of my back, sending me to the floor. I was confused, unable to understand what was going on.

"Alvin!" Hiccup yelled. I rolled myself on my back and seen our captor stand right over up. For someone so big, he could be pretty sneaky. Behind him, coming from the door to the workshop were two Outcasts warriors to each side of Alvin. I could not escape from them, not unarmed.

"You thought you could double-cross ol' Alvin the Trecherous did you?" he stated. He held the pot with one of his large hands. "I don't know what else you've been doing behind my back, but I knew that you would be behind whoever took those berries. I knew you'd be lying about that potion not working and I knew it was only a matter of time before you tried to brew it yourselfâ€¦" He raised the pot closer to his gullet.

"Alvin, you don't want to drink that, believe me!" Hiccup told

him.

Alvin refused to listen. "Shut it, I'll be strong enough to rule the whole Archipelago after this." He drank the potion and promptly fell to the ground. Apparently, the potion tended to knock someone out cold the moment they drank it.

"What did you do to him boy!?" The Outcast guards shouted, their weapons trained on Hiccup. Of course, while everyone had been busy paying attention to Alvin, they were not looking at the boy who was slightly shorter than Hiccup reach the weapon's rack and grab a crossbow. I smiled as I pulled the trigger. One of the guards fell. I made my first kill, not by claw, not by fang, not by Breath, but by arrow. A human weapon.

With an automatic reflex, I pulled back the reloading mechanism, springs inside the magazine pushed another bolt into place, ready to fire again. "Get down!" I told the boy, he rolled out of the way and dropped to the ground just in time to evade a swing of the axe from the surviving guard. I shot another arrow, this time I missed. While I was getting good at the crossbow, I was still not perfect at it. The arrow however hit something else. It hit one of the barrels of Zippleback gas, puncturing the barrel and producing a jet of flammable gasses in a blacksmith's forge that still had fire in it.

About the only saving grace was that the guard was rendered blind from the gas clouds. Hiccup and I took this opportunity to escape from the front door. Thankfully, it was unbarred and unguarded. I suppose Alvin must have thought he and his men must have believed themselves to be enough for whatever confrontation they were expecting. We barred the door, locking the surviving Outcast inside, waiting for whatever fate is ahead of him. He tried to force open the door, battering it with his fists. All of it useless. In a way, I pitied him, but he was my enemy. It was unfortunate that humans lacked flame proof scales.

We ran from the door before seeing the result. The explosion was deafeningly loud, but there was no fireball that reached to us. It wouldn't be long before other Outcasts came looking at us.

"That went better than I thought it would," Hiccup told me.

I just stared at him, incredulous at what I was hearing. "You expected worse?"

"I was expecting to take a cut back there and to be missing a few items." Hiccup had on him the other pot containing the second potion and had his small knife held in a sheath by his belt. In the confusion of the zippleback gas cloud, he had also managed to steal the book off of Alvin.

"You let me get this straight, you were expecting Alvin to realize we were brewing that potion?" I asked him.

"No, not really, I just saw it as a possibility, though I was not expecting Alvin to drop like that and the Outcasts to go berserk."

I nodded. "So how'd that happen?"

"That potion seems to knock people out as a side effect" I recommend not taking it for now, I could use you awake for a while." I nodded. Things were going to get rather hectic and I did not think I wanted to sleep through it all. He handed me the pot. "Don't know how long it will last, but you should be the one to carry it." I nodded.

"Is he dead?" I told him. It would be fortunate if Alvin died. He was not someone I would have wanted to fight, even if I had my breath. With any luck the Zippleback gas choked him and burned the remains when it blew.

"I wouldn't count on it"

"I can dream can't I?" My hopes assumed Alvin was still a normal human. There was no telling on how twisted he would have become from the explosive force of the gas.

"The prisoners have escaped! Get Alvin!" Shouted someone across the tunnel, an Outcast warrior who along with others. They

I muttered a curse under my breath. I shot one in the leg, stopping him on the ground with a mangled foot. My crossbow did not shoot fast enough to defeat them all, and they were getting closer. "How do we deal with them?" I asked.

"Like this." I saw Hiccup brandish a set of keys, all of them barely used. Another thing we did was make copies of the various keys we could gather from the Outcasts. Camicazi provided us with the shapes by taking a mold of any keys we could find. With those keys, Hiccup unlocked one of the nearby prison cells, one of the ones filled with my kin. My Kin burst out of the cell, making cries of freedom and celebration. They did not care that one of Herd aided them, they just wanted freedom. They ploughed through the Outcasts line. Likely killing or knocking them out.

All save one. That old bronze Gronckle that apparently knew who I was approached me. _"So your scent is does not lie. It is you." _He told me. So now, I knew. Apparently, I still smelled the same. Which was good, as it meant that any of my Kin who knew it would know I am one of them. I tried to reply but it was clear he did not understand me. So I just nodded, body language was simpler. He understood that._ "It is unthinkable that you have become one of the Herd, though I will not complain" For this service, you have my approval. I will report to the King about your current situation. I bid you good bye." _

"What was that all about?" Hiccup asked. "A Gronckle just spoke to you."

"Oh that, merely an ally." I told him. "And you've had been speaking to a dragon for weeks now."

"No, I've only been speaking to a Viking boy and I'm more dragon than you." I just shook my head.

The Gronckle, despite his incredible age, injury to the wings, and status as a commoner, ran ahead of the group of charging dragons. Maybe I had underestimated him. _"For the King's glory, we will return to the Nest!"_ He roared.

"Okay, let's begin opening more of these cages," Hiccup told me, using the keys to open even more cages of frightened and anxious commoners. "With any luck, Astrid heard the loud explosion or at least sees the rampaging dragons and Outcasts." I nodded. Hiccup because he could not remove the Zippleback gas from the workshop, decided that the best use for it was to use it as an alert to begin the escape. Granted, he had hoped to do it in a place that allowed it to be heard more clearly, he had realized that at the very least it would cause panicking in the Outcast ranks. This was of course before the dragons would be released.

"You did realize that we stand a chance of getting killed if theseâ€| captives we release decided we would be better off dead right?"

"Yeah, I did. That's not a problem is it?"

"It might beâ€|" I said, I was looking into an empty cage. It was not unlocked, yet had nothing in itâ€| except for a gaping hole in the ground. It brought painful memories. The ground beneath my feet began cracking by some unseen force, and I only had a split second to evade it before I got swallowed up by the gaping maw that appeared right from under me.

The serpent's body emerged from the hole. Its form bore a scars in the shape a bite mark, a gift from my mother. "Toothless!" Hiccup called me. I did not know his name, but I knew he was dangerous.

"You!" _I saw familiar eyes look at me, though I knew they were mostly useless. _"Young Night Fury, we meet again. I shall take pleasure in destroying you." _It Deaths from what I understood had very bad eye sight, so it might have known who I was only by keen smell alone. It was very possible that he couldn't even tell I had been turned into one of the Herd since he referred to make a Night Fury.

"Hiccup, keep opening cages, I'll take care of him!" I shot an arrow at him. He evaded the attack by ducking his head. Climbing to my feet, I made a run for it with the Whispering Death on my metaphorical tail. Hopefully Hiccup would do well without me. The first time I met him, I was a mostly helpless fledgling. Now at least, I was a warrior. Albeit, a human one, but still, I was a warrior and Squire. That had to count for something.

* * *

><p>It wasn't long after Hiccup and that dragon left before we heard the faint echoes of some explosion, a phantom shockwave of force come unexpectedlyâ€| at least for anyone who wasn't aware of what it was. Then, Outcasts came streaming in towards the source of that force. So far, Hiccup's mad plan was working as he had expected it to. It was time for us to do our part.<p>

Once the Outcasts seemed to have stopped pouring through, Camicazi, equipped with the keys Hiccup had copied for her, deftly opened our gate without any hesitation. She had her sword drawn, eager for the fight. Fishlegs held a crossbow, a weapon he made alongside Hiccup. Oddly, for the largest and most physically strong member of our

class, Fishlegs did not revel in using that strength. Then again, Fishlegs and Hiccup were very odd. I only had with me my axe, a weapon I have had ever since I was a little girl.

We all have had enough of Outcast Island and Alvin to last us a life time. I still failed to see how this was supposed to be less dangerous than just sneaking out and stealing a boat, but Hiccup had been adamant in wanting to free as many captives out of Alvin's hands. Even if some of them were dragonsâ€¦

Which is why the first thing we did when we opened our cages was to find some more of them. Alvin had seen to it we were kept as far away from other captives as much possible, since he had plans for us, but Camicazi had spent weeks navigating these tunnels and meeting with these other captives with promises of freedom. "Hey, it's me again!" she told to one of the cages. I could see several of the captives inside already had weapons of their own. Again likely, the Bog Burglar's doing. She had opened their cell and then proceeded to work on the next. Not that I complained. I was glad to finally have allies by my side once more.

"That is a really handy skill," I told her. Part of the reason our escape was possible was because she had next to free reign once Hiccup engineered a workable excuse for her. And she was alright, if a bit immodest. Granted, I found my fighting skills have gotten to the point I could consistently beat her, since I spent all my time practicing and training. She still took those defeats in stride.

"Well, I am a master escapist. Alvin had not a chance keeping me under lock and key. I should teach you it sometime, it's real fun."

I considered that for a moment. It wasn't really dishonorable to know how to breakout of prisons or know how to pilfer things from your enemies. After all, many famous Viking heroes tended to be quite underhanded in their actions. "No," I replied. "Not something I find myself wanting to do."

"Suit yourself."

After freeing all of the captives in this section, we numbered about thirty at this point. That was not all of them though. Many of those who were too young or too old simply stayed in their cells to not be a hindrance. Only eight of us had weapons, so those of us who were armed formed a perimeter to cover the others. Fishlegs was at our rear and kept checking our backs.

"Take us to an armory!" one of the unarmed men shouted. Another added, "We need as many weapons as possible!"

"In a minute, so impatientâ€¦" Camicazi led us to one of the armories, unfortunately the Outcasts had the sense to guard it in the moment of an emergency. There were five of them in all, each holding short swords and wielding shields. The moment, those guards spotted us, they readied their weapons and moved toward us.

Fishlegs tried to shoot one of them and while he had significantly improved since he been called Berk's Worst Archer, he wasn't accurate enough to shoot away from one of the advancing Outcast's shields. I

however, did not have any issues. When the Outcasts started advancing, I charged at them, leaving all of my other companions following slightly behind me.

One of them, one slightly larger and given better looking equipment than the others, likely their local leader engaged me in combat. I shouted a battle cry and swung my axe only for him to block it with his shield. He retaliated by trying to use his shield to as a weapon. I parried his sword my axe. Unfortunately for me, he was wearing heavy mail which covered most of his body, making it for me to take him on.

So I did the smart thing, and went for the hand that was holding the weapon. See, most Vikings, like him, and admittedly, I fell into this bad habit as well, forget to wear armor. He lost his fingers. He howled in agony as he dropped his sword. The pain was so great, he lost focus on the battle and I battled away his shield before he could use it to attack again. My axe hit his head and he was down.

Our fighting was going well. Camicazi parried blow after blow with her sword, while spouting insults and profanities that demoralized the Outcasts. Fishlegs kept shooting arrows, not to kill the Outcasts himself, but rather to tax their defenses and energy so that others might have an easier time. The former captives and slaves attacked them like wild animals, as that was what Alvin had reduced them to in all their time in captivity. The Outcasts that guarded the armory either fell shortly afterward, with only one survivor retreating to get back up.

Soon, those of us that were unarmed, soon were equipped with the various weapons the Outcast had employed for themselves. All of them were eager to have some Outcast blood on their hands.

"Now all we have to do is do this again," Camicazi quipped.

"Not exactly, Fishlegs, you and some of the other larger men should carry extra weapons."

"But why?" He asked.

"So we don't have to keep going back and forth to equip everyone we meet." I told him. "It saves time if we bring some extra weapons."

"Ooh, that's smart."

"Not really," I told her. "One of our blacksmiths, Gobber had a cart he would fill up with weapons every time Berk got attacked. Any random villager could just take a weapon from there and pay for it later. This is that same idea, just without the cart or the trading going along."

"Still, this is rather exciting isn't it?" Camicazi said. "This is the most fun I've ever had while being held hostage. Wait till my mother hears about this!"

"Yeah," was my only reply. I wonderedâ€¦ just what would happen when I returned to Berk. Undoubtedly, escaping Alvin the Treacherous was a big deal, one that theoretically came with no small amount of

prestige. But breaking out of Outcast Island by helping cause the _entire_ prisoner population to break free, that was unheard of and something that was worthy of a saga. If breaking out of Outcast Island along with every prisoner there did not bring my family honor, then I do not know what else will.

* * *

><p>After receiving Elder Gothi's advice, I had bided my time. As most of Berk's fleet was destroyed and most of my warriors were injured and fatigued after two large battles happening in close succession to each other, I had plenty of time to wait for them to recover. I spent nearly a month formulating plans and writing letters to see those would aid me. Usually, I wrote to other Chiefs and offered a sum as payment. Unfortunately, I was mostly alone in this. About the only one who had bothered to join me was Bertha, who had the same problem. Alvin had apparently captured both of her daughters, even though she only remembered one. She likes to say her daughter punched Alvin so hard, he now seen things in twos.<p>

Currently, Bertha and I were on the second day of our joint-voyage to Outcast Island. Neither of us had the fleets or man power to break Outcast Island on our own after the battles we faced earlier in the month. But together, we could equate the strength of our old forces. The agreement we had was that we would move our full forces together. Though, I knew Bertha, would not be so honorable with her word. I had seen her send small scouting parties now and again.

It was after noon and we hid from Outcast Island, waiting for a moonless night so that we might attack. We both knew it would have been a bad idea to attack Outcast island when everyone was aware and had light enough to see our approach. Not only would that give the enemy an advantage to use siege weapons on our ships, it also gave Alvin more time to harm our children. Once the conditions were right, we would land an assault on the docks and into the tunnels.

Currently, we based ourselves on the far side of a nearby island and hid our ships behind any obstacles we could find. Our problem, however, was that we weren't the only ones planning a sneak attack.

"Snotlout, how many times have I told you that you were not allowed to come here!?" I yelled at my nephew and his companions. "Especially, not, I repeat, not with the twins." I had to give him credit. I would never have expected the three of them to spend a day inside a few food storage barrels. The only reason they were discovered was because we had coincidentally decided to open the barrel containing one of the twins, I forgot which it was, which prompted a search for all of the others.

"It's been a month!" complained Snotlout. "I haven't heard about Astrid at all until you made that announcement last week." I had informed the whole of my Tribe in a general conference that I would be saving my son, to the displeasure of many, ever since I had met with Gothi. Since then, I had been making weekly status updates for my correspondences from the other Tribes.

"And so you thought it would be a smart idea to go and drag two of

your fellow classmates into danger?"

Tuffnut spoke up. "I would like to make it clear to all of you, we are not with him."

"Nope, we decided to go where the danger was without his approval." His sister, Ruffnut continued.

"So, just ignore us and we'll go back to hiding." Tuffnut replied.

"Thanks alot, guys" Snotlout added.

"Hey, it's not our fault you decided to follow the same plan as us" Ruffnut stated.

"I invited you to come with me!" Snotlout shouted. "And you did not bring the-you-know-what."

They argued and argued, until I could barely stand it any longer. I was not too upset at them though. No, I had way too much experience dealing with children like this to get too upset. It was deal a problem I had to deal with. Bertha and I had agreed to launch a full scale attack tomorrow night, as soon as the moon was gone. However, if I were to send the children home, whatever group and party I would send would not be participating in the battle. They would be both insulted with a "babysitting job" denying them glory and be unable to assist me.

Bertha spoke up, with a statement that did not make this job any easier. "You can barely control a bunch of rowdy teenagers, it's no wonder your son decided to go run off and get captured."

"My son did not decide to get captured." _Unless, Hiccup decided it was better to go after Outcasts instead of dragons" _I was defensive at the accusation, obviously. No parent likes to be insulted like that.

"Well, if it weren't for your son, maybe my daughter wouldn't be in this mess." The main problem with allying with Bertha was that she did blame Hiccup for her child's disappearance. This mostly had to do with Thuggory's report stating it was my son who had led the missing children.

"We don't know what happened" I wanted to at least try to be civil. I could handle a wounded pride, so long as I had my son back. I would be fine. "But my son is not at fault!" I would have argued with her a little more, if it weren't for an interruption.

"Uh, Chief Stoick," said Snotlout, breaking away from his argument with the twins "I see a lot of dragons."

I turned up and looked at the sky and found several dragons over head. All of them were flying from the same general location. "That is a lot of dragons" I agreed. I drew a spyglass, a gift from my son, and rapidly ran to the highest point on the island. Through my spyglass, I could see that all of those dragons were fleeing from Outcast Island. It was not a dragon raid, there were way too few of them and it was the wrong time of day. That meant that the dragons must have come from Outcast Island itself. Most Viking Tribes had a

supply of captive dragons, usually a dozen or two kept for training purposes. But Alvin apparently had around somewhere over five dozen of them. Though _why_ that mad Outcast had that many to begin with was questionable. Granted, Alvin likely just sold them to the highest bidder. There were plenty of Tribes who needed dragons for many purposes, such as meat or scale.

However, what Alvin did with those dragons is not as important as the fact they were escaping. What was happening on Outcast Island? And what was happening to my son? I wish I could have done this under cover of night, but it appeared that the gods want me to attack when it was still day. "What's happening?" asked pretty much everyone all at the same time.

"Dragons are fleeing Outcast Islandâ€¦| Bertha, our children are in danger, we have to go, now!" She nodded in agreement. And we both ran to our boats. Our warriors, Hairy Hooligan and Bog Burglar alike rushed to their respective craft.

"Hey, you're not going without me!" yelled Snotlout who ran alongside me.

Ruffnut and Tuffnut were right beside him. "Or us!" the shouted at the same time.

It pained me to do this, but I knew I would not be able to stop them. After all, they went through ridiculous lengths just to come here. All they had to do was force themselves on the ship the moment we left and I would be stuck with them. "Alright, but you follow my orders to the letter, got that?"

Snotlout nodded, and after some consideration, the twins followed, too. I hoped I would not be regretting this descision.

* * *

><p>What did that boy to me? All I could recall was drinking that potion andâ€¦| falling. My head hurt. My body ached. Footsteps were approaching. I could not move. I could not see. I could not even breath. All I could do was hear. What has happened to me?<p>

"Blown off the hinges." I heard a voice say. It was Savage. Finally, someone competent. My two escorts likely deserted me the moment I fell, leaving those boy to do what he wanted. Stoick's disappointment probably did not have the guts to slay me when he had the changes. Those two failures of Outcasts of mine should hope they die in a fire before meeting me again.

"Man, his back burned to a crisp!" I heard another voice say. I recognized it as someone unimportant. Finally, I was breathing again, my lungs took in air, sweet refreshing air. The burning ash was a sweet smell against my nose. Oh how, I loved the smell of fire.

"And this other one has something sticking out of his helmetâ€¦| must have died before the explosion set it." I heard Savage say. Explosion? What had while I was unconsciousâ€¦| and why had I survived?

"Is that Alvin? Is he dead?"

"Those don' look like any burn marks I ever seen!"

"I don't think that's Alvin anymoreâ€|" How could I not be me I wondered?

I could feel my muscles become free to move once again feeling pain the escape my body. I tried to stand up. "It's moving!" Said a voice as it approached. My vision returned at this point, allowing me to see the traitor of an Outcast draw his sword and attempt to cut me down. I raised my hand in defense, but without a weapon, the warrior wounded my arm.

"You dare strike Alvin the Trecherous!" I shouted as I stood up. My bleeding arm limped for a moment from the wound.

"I'm not following a monster like you!" said the defiant warrior. I had no idea what he was talking about, but I had made my decision, I was going to kill this man as soon as I had an opportunity. I hated free thinkers. At that point, he and I looked at my wounded arm and somethingâ€| unthinkable had happened. The wound sealed rapidly, blood dried, and skin reformed. "That's not possible!" _Then,_ I felt something grow on my arm, scales of some sort grew along the length of the wound and towards my hand. My hand in turn started growing massive claws, each the size of a dagger. My arm grew more muscled very rapidly. The warrior raised his weapon at me again and this time, I parried the blow using my new claws, as though I was wielding several daggers in a single hand. Then I lunged at the warrior and cut off his face using my new weapons. He fell.

"Alvin!" Savage said. "You'reâ€| aliveâ€|"

"Why wouldn't I not be?" I asked him.

"You'reâ€| kind of differentâ€| Sirâ€|" He told me.

I started examining body, apparently, I had changed somewhat. I had apparently grown a small pair of semi-transparent wings and smalls horns atop my head. Along with much of my lower body now being covered in scales and glows. "So I haveâ€| Tell me, what's our status?"

"Not good Alvin, the whole island is engaged in battle, the prisoners, both human and dragon alike, are looseâ€| The Heirs we captured, they threw the whole island into chaos."

"Elaborate."

"The dragons flee as soon as they could, but the human captives are still struggling to maintain a foothold."

"Good, focus on the humans then, especially the Heir. The dragons are far more trouble than they're worth."

"Yes, Alvin." As he said that, my Outcast warriors, who had stayed silent and fearful in my prescence followed my lieutenant away from me.

With my eyes being better than I ever remembered them, I realized now that the workshop that I had locked those boys in had gone up in

flamesâ€| and that I was the sole survivor. That potionâ€| worked. I had not only become stronger, but also gained the ability to heal from nearly any injury it seemedâ€| at such a miniscule cost. After all, weak, simple humanity was virtually worthless compared to the power of being a dragon. I did not know what kind of dragon I was becoming, but that did not matter. I was going to that Stoick's little disappointment by ripping out his throat.

* * *

><p>For those of you who really didn't understand why I gave Hiccup such a weird transformation method. Well, that little Nightmare sequence is one of the reasons. You can't ever do things like that in a straight forward instant change. Alsoâ€| the stuff about Alvinâ€|.

Bowling existed as far back as Ancient Egypt and Rome. It evolved a bit and was obviously a very different game than what we have today, but for the sake of comedy, I decided not to be historically accurate here.

Yes, there's popcorn in this setting, even though America still was not discovered by Christopher Columbus. Though I believe at this time Vikings did sail to the New Worldâ€| assuming we go by real world historyâ€| HtTYD history on the other hand tends to get a bit weirder.

"Empty Mouth" is the dragon equivalent of saying of "Empty Handed". Dragons don't have hands and many do not have paws. All of them however use the mouth as a manipulator, so it makes sense for them to have that saying.

For those of you asking how the old Gronckle got captured by the Outcasts, it's not really important and won't be a plot relevant point, so I will explain it here. Way I see it, all dragons more or less can swim or in the case of a Gronckle float, because each of them has flight bladders and firegas reserves that are lighter than air. That's really the only explanation for how Gronckles can fly, too. All things considered the Gronckle, being too old to fight in raids, just floated home and got captured by Outcasts while fishing. It was merely coincidence that Toothless met him on Outcast Island.

Oh and when I said that this was a multi-Transformation story, I meant that it wasn't just going to be Toothless or Hiccup changing. I decided Alvin the Treacherous should get transformed, too. I don't think anyone did Alvin transforming before, so I thought it would be cool. As for what he's turning into, it's something from the books.

7. Chapter 7

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Very serious chapter this time. And we're nearing the end of this story arc.

**This chapterâ€| isâ€| wowâ€| I may need to tone it down. You'll

know what I mean. **

* * *

><p>This was not how things should be. Today, I should have been coming home after another attempt at finding the dragon's primary Nest at Helheim's Gate. I should have been speaking to Gobber about the results of Dragon Training and hoping that my son had done well enough to make me proud. I should have been preparing for the final exam.<p>

I was doing none of that. Today, I was attacking Outcast Island in broad day light because I had no other choice. I was allying myself with the Bog Burglars, with Bertha, of all things, because our children were being held captive in the same prison. I wasn't going to pay a ransom. No, I was going to do more than that.

I held my spyglass up, scanning the ever approaching Outcast island fortress. The dragons had mostly gone away by now, at least an hour since Snotlout had pointed out to me that they were leaving the island in droves. Now, all that was left of them were a few stragglers and, more importantly, the trail of devastation they had caused in their wake. In the distance, I could see the smoking remnants of siege catapults and trebuchets, the fires that had destroyed them only smoldering gently. That was fortunate for us as it meant that the Outcasts would be unable to sink our ships as we approached.

As our ships got closer, I learned that the dragons were not the only cause for the chaos and devastation upon the island. For now, I could see and hear the battle that still raged. I saw warriors clad in the traditional scale mailed Viking warrior garb combating men and women dressed in nothing but soiled old rags. It was not hard to guess that the latter group must have been slaves or captives that had been set free en masse. Whatever did this created great chaos and destruction. Loki must have favored me. I accepted it, trickster god or not, if it meant my son would be coming home would me.

Hooligan and Bog Burglar ships were completely unopposed as we ran our ships aground. None of the combatants noticed us until they heard the sound of oak wood scrapping across wet sand and weathered rock. This caused anyone who was not rendered deaf or dying to turn their attention towards us. As soon as Bog Burglar and Hooligan warriors began disembarking our craft, the Outcasts began making shouts of retreat and backed away from us. They did not want to face a battle on two fronts. _Smarter than I thought they would beâ€|_

The scantily clad and weary captives, stood their ground. Either they were braver than the Outcasts or simply too tired to run. They still held their weapons firm, none of them were too tired to be enslaved again. Admittedly, I would be perfectly within my rights to take them for my own, but this was not a time for it. I did not want to make this more complicated than I needed to when my son's life was at stake. I simply needed them not against me. "I am Chief Stoick the Vast, Chieftain of the Hairy Hooligan Tribe!" I shouted as I leapt on to the ground. Behind me were Snotlout and the twins, anxious for a real battle. "I am only here for my son. Stand aside, I have no quarrel with you." This did not convince them to drop their arms or ease their guard.

I saw Bertha leap from her boat and give her own proclamation: "I am Bertha the Unsinkable, or if you prefer, 'Big Boobied' Bertha I am Chief of the Tribe of Bog Burglars. I seek my daughter, Camicazi."

At that, the some former captives eased their guard and began murmuring to each other. I could barely hear and understand it all, but I got the idea that they mostly knew who she was. "Is she really her mother? She's so big and Cami is soâ€¦ smallâ€¦" "I got my axe from her!" "I seen her a couple times before the big bust, who knew she was royalty?" Bertha was excited to hear the deeds that the former prisoners attributed to her daughter. Apparently, the girl had been running around Outcast Island, gathering information, and setting up a large scale revolt. Still, I wished that one of them knew anything at all about my son.

While, they were discussing and gossiping, one man stood out from the crowd. "Out of the way!" he called as he shoved his fellow captives aside. No, he wasn't a man, he was much too short, much too young. Before me, was a boy about my son's age. He looked, somewhat healthier than the other slaves, though that could just be because he wasn't broken in yet. He had dark hair and green eyes and seemed to be rather skinny. On his back was a crossbow and tied to his waist was what appeared to be a cooking pot of some sort. "Are you Hiccup's father?" he asked me.

I nodded. Whoever he was, he knew my son by name. That meant he likely knew more about what has been happening than most of the others on this rock. "Yes, I am. Now, who are you? How do you know my son?"

"I am a friend friend of hisâ€¦" he told me. He was hesitant for a moment before declaring, "My name is Toothless, sir." I blinked at that. Few people were willing to declare my son his friend. I wonder what my son must have done to him.

I noticed that some of the boy's teeth appeared to be missing. He must have had a problem with losing his baby teeth when he was younger. His family must have been very uncreative in naming him. "Do you know what happened to my son?"

"And Camicazi?" I heard Bertha add. Snotlout wanted to add his own statement, but a glare from me made the question die in his mouth.

Toothless nodded. "Yes, I've been with them for the pastâ€¦ month." He must have been unsure for the time he spent, he might not have been aware of time passing underground, since it was common slaving practice not to let them see sunlight. "Hiccup was the one who thought of breaking open every cage on the islandâ€¦ He tricked Alvin into making him think he was making weapons for him, but in reality, he had been slipping the weapons to Camicazi, who gave them to the slavesâ€¦"

I just stared at the boy. My son had _deceived Alvin, _a man whose epitaph was 'the Treacherous'. And by the looks of things, it made sense. He took the talent of devastation and mayhem that the gods decided to give him and made it into a weapon. I struggled to believe that my son, the son that sometimes I regretted having, _did not need rescuing_. Maybe I should consider taking him with me more often on

my voyagesâ€¦ "Is this true?"

"On my honor," he declared. That confirmed it.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"I do not know." My hopes were crushed upon hearing those words. I had assumed he knew where my son was given that he knew him. "I was separated from him byâ€¦ a dragon, a Whispering Death. He wanted to kill me, specifically, so I had to leave to get Him away from Hiccup. Went out here as soon as I was sure he wouldn't chase after him."

I nodded. He was brave and willing to put himself in harm's way to aid my son. Whoever this Toothless was, he was definitely a friend worth having. Even better, he gave me the information that I needed. I turned to the slaves, who had been listening intently at our conversation. "So there you have it. My son-

"And my daughter-" Bertha added.

"-have set you all free, all we ask of you is to let us pass unopposed." At this, many of the former Outcast slaves eased their guards and began slowly moving out of the way. Some hesitated for a moment before following their compatriots. The last few, however gave me and Bertha a short bow before raising their weapons before falling into the ranks of Hooligan and Bog Burglar warriors. These few, I would offer a place by my side when this was all over, men that respectable were hard to come by.

As we advanced forward from the beach, Bertha and I had left a garrison on our boats consisting of roughly a third of our total forces. They would be rapidly constructing siege weapons and keeping watch over our ships. I did not want to find our boats have been reduced to rubble after the events at Fort Sinister. Snotlout and the twins advanced beside me, eager to bash some heads. Toothless went behind me, his crossbow drawn; I wanted the one who last seen my son as close to me as possible.

We approached what was a large cave that had the remains of a steel gate that was blasted off of its frame lying tattered on the ground. Based on the appearances this was one of the main entrances to the interior of their settlement. Unlike most other Viking Tribes, the Outcasts built much of their home on the insides of a massive natural underground complex of caves and tunnels. This was a cheap and practical design choice given that the Outcasts lacked much in the way of wood and dragons were an ever present threat. We advanced further, a torch in my hand. Hiccup's friend had warned us that the Whispering Death might still be a threat as he was only able to escape the dragon by running into the bright lights.

The tunnel divided into various side paths as we went forward. I ordered several squads of men to pursue each of the different directions as a few of my most trusted warriors and the kids, led by myself, went down the what appeared to be main tunnel. Most of them would undoubtedly lead to dead ends or lead back in a loop. The Outcasts designed them to be as confusing as possible to dissuade invasions. My men had orders to take anyone they found, former slave or Outcast, to the entrance when possible. Granted, I wish I brought balls of yarn to help guide my men.

Before long however, I seen several large shapes appear from the distance. They were men, based on how tall and large they appeared. In the middle of them was on man who had, for some strange reason, twin pinpricks of glowing white light where his eyes would be. "Stoick and Bertha," I heard come from the central figure. The voice was that of Alvin's but it had been warped, sounded more like a foul growl. "I was expecting some rebellious captives, never would I have thought you'd be mad enough to attack my Island at a time like this. Especially since I've been so willing to make a deal over the fate of your children."

"We know better than to trust you!" Bertha stated. "We're taking back our children and your life, you child stealing monster." For once, I agreed with her.

"You don't know the half of it," said Alvin. "Men, light the torches, I want them to see this!" Two Outcast warriors did as they were told and lit the torches by a tinder box.

The sight I beheld just caused my jaw to drop. I had heard rumors, stories even, that Alvin had a witch for a mother. Granted, this detail in of itself was not really all that impressive, especially since Gothi, the Berk village elder, technically qualified as a witch herself, and I had married into a family that reveled in the esoteric since my father in law was a skilled, albeit inaccurate soothsayer. What was important was that Alvin's mother was reputedly a very dark and cruel witch who practiced evil spells and incantations. It seemed Alvin must have been pursuing a family tradition.

Alvin was confident enough that he decided to forgo any sort of armor or clothing except for his pants, allowing us to see what had become of him. His body had been warped and twisted in many areas. As I had seen before, his eyes glowed piecing white hot. Half of his face had been consumed entirely by white scales that, if I looked closely, allowed me to see all of the individual arteries and veins that held the blood. Spike horns grew atop his head. He had grown a pair of wings, small, feeble things that had jutted out of his back. I could see his _hearts, _literally, beating inside his chest, rhythmically. Worst of all, I could see the his right hand. Covered in scales and visibly displaying the blood moving through his body, it was oversized in comparison to his whole body and featured massive black claws that I could only classify as some sort of transition between daggers and short swords. _Odin, I seek an answer. What kind of monster was Alvin now?_ All I could tell he was some strange mix of dragon and man, but not any sort of dragon I had ever heard of.

By the looks and the silence, I was not the only one stunned into silence. Alvin was an abomination, a pretty freak one at that. The only who was brave enough to speak was Toothless. "You should have died in that fire!" I heard him say. That was enough to shake off the fear and disgust I felt. _Alvin deserves to die in many fires, _I mentally added. Anyone who sets Alvin on fire deserves recognition in my book.

"Well, that didn't work now did it? I'm one hundred percent fireproof now!"

I had my sword drawn in a defensive stance. I was going to cut Alvin's head off, Odin willing that I am not yet ready to eat at his side. Alvin on the other hand had decided that offense was the best

defense and was armed with his clawed right hand and his favorite hatchet on the left. Everyone had their weapons drawn, all expecting a great battle unfold.

It would not come to pass. Just as we were about to fight, I heard a sound approaching overhead. It was faint at first, but as it got closer, I could hear stone being torn ground up. "Why doesn't he just leave me alone?" I heard Toothless complain, deadpan.

Rocks fell from overhead and me and the children barely had time to escape their fall. Unfortunately my students, the rocks were numerous enough and fell in such a way that it separated me and the rest of the adults. I could barely see them through the pillars of stone. Above me, I could see the face of a Whispering Death lurking in the ceiling. It must have been the same one Toothless had claimed to have escaped earlier. He fired a shot from his crossbow, only for the dragon to reel back into the protection of his tunnel and pop out unharmed. I hurled a rock at the monster, grabbing his attention. "Get out of there!"

"Damn that dragon!" Alvin shouted before starting up in a flurry of curses. The good news about the Whispering Death's cave in was that it separated Alvin from my group and the kids. I was unsure if Alvin's appearance made him stronger or gave him other abilities, but he did not seem to be willing to dig his way through the rocks.

"There's another tunnel here!" I heard Snotlout shout.

"Take it, that's an order!" I shouted. I could hear the distinct sound of footsteps take off in a sprint. The dragon however, seemed intent on following them. I wondered for a moment, what could that boy have done to make that dragon so angry?

I sighed. They were in the god's hands now. There was no way, I could help them now.

"And here I was, looking forward to beating Alvin's behind," complained Bertha.

"As I was. He has caused us much grief in the past, it is time we made him pay for it," I told her. There was another side tunnel to our left. With any luck, it would lead us to some place we could regroup. "Think we should go here?"

* * *

><p>When I was young, I used to have night terrors. Most of them were the repetition and variants of the same event that happened so long ago.<p>

I had been a mere hatchling playing in the woods and stalking bugs for my simple amusement. My mother was visiting a small island, one that was not so big as to have any deadly predators on it, so as long as I stayed in the woods, mother deemed it was safe for me to wander on my own. I was chasing a butterfly, a beautiful but wispy thing that had caught my fancy since I had not seen anything like it before. I ran off, after it, spending the day making foolish attempts to take it for myself.

This all stopped when I had approached the den of this Kin. A strange thing that had the body of a serpent, yet had a jaw that with many, many teeth organized in a strange almost circular fashion. It had been dozing quietly and I in my innocent curiosity awoken it. All he did was take one look at me and mutter something under his breath before declaring to destroy me. Fortunately for me, I was smart enough to know fear and ran.

For the first time in my life, I knew what fear was. Real fear, terror. I ran and hid all over the island hoping that the larger and more powerful Kin would not destroy me. I was so young that I could not fly or swim away to safety when my hunter was not given those same restrictions. I was fortunate that I had made enough shouts of fear that my mother had heard me and come to my aid. But in those dreams, that never happened. Sometimes, I was eaten alive, other times, that Kin murdered me in brutal ways. I never went chasing butterflies again.

Meeting him for the first time in so long triggered a flash of emotions, a surge of long buried fears that reminded me how helpless I was back then. I did not want Hiccup to face that same terrors this Kin brought upon me. No, he wasn't Kin. I now had a word that was less than that. He was a _dragon. _He was not my Kin.

Earlier, I had escaped from him by running through a metal door that led to the outside. Fortunately, the sun was bright enough overhead to deter him. Whispering Deaths hated the bright light, something to do with their eyes being really bad.

When I had brought him far enough away from Hiccup, I had decided my best course of action would be to find someone who would aid me in destroying him so that I could help my friend and ally. This meant Camicazi and Fishlegs, obviously. I would never dream about asking Astrid to help me. Granted, I had failed to locate my other allies, but finding Hiccup's father was better.

In moon that I had known him, Hiccup had never told me just how important he was. I had no idea that he was related to important people in the Viking world. In a way, he was much like me, the son of a Flight Commander. This made my plan of setting myself as a diplomat that much easier. My King would be delighted.

Unfortunately, I did not have Stoick the Vast, the man Hiccup claims could strange a Monstrous Nightmare as a baby. No, I had with me three others who were in my relative age. I did not know who they were, as Stoick had not introduced them to me and Hiccup had not spoken much about the people he knew back home, though I had an idea of some of them. So they were complete strangers to me. Still, I liked our chances at taking down this _dragon._

Right now, me and my allies were running as fast as we could, that dragon was right behind us. Spikes were being thrown from its body and fortunately for me, its aim seemed very poor and kept missing us. I could see a large number of caves that used to have been former cages. That gave me a plan. "Hey, I got an idea."

"Is it any better than any of Hiccup's?" said the female of the group.

"Does it involve mauling or not?" said the male look alike. They

might have been related. Hiccup had explained to me the concept of twins when I had asked him about Astrid and Camicazi. Granted, they were not twins. These two must have been Ruffnut and Tuffnut, since Hiccup had alluded to them when he described twins.

"I hope not," I replied.

"Then I don't know if that's good or bad. I little mauling couldn't hurtâ€¦" said the male.

"Lower back or upper?"

"Uh, guys, not the time for itâ€¦" said the dark haired male. He was considerably more muscled than I was so that meant he likely had more strength and better skill at melee than I did.

"Alright, he just wants me and his eye sight is poor, I want you all to break off and hide in those caves, then I want you to attack him from behind." They all gave grunts of approval. We passed by several of the caves. I picked what I felt might have been a good pair to launch the attack from. I declare. "There! Go now." the dark haired boyheaded into the cage on my right and the twins went to the left.

I had began slowing down, making the dragon inch closer so that my allies could launch the attack. I was prepared to duck out of the way in the event the dragon attacked me. Instead, however the dragon was not coming at me. _"You are a fool to discuss your own plans and tactics in front of your enemy."_ He declared. That dragon understood what I was saying and acted accordingly. He did not advance forward past the two cages where the others were. Instead, he turned to the cage that had the dark hair body. He lunged forward. I heard the sounds of the boy trying to fend off the beast that attacked him. The beast repeatedly attacked the cage, throwing spines and fire whenever appropriate.

I just stared for a moment, frozen with fear. Before I had become one of them, no Kin, no dragon, could understand at all what the Herd was saying. But this one, this Whispering Death had understood my plans and had decided that the best means of attack were to take out my allies when I had moved them out of position.

"Help me!" screamed the boy. I heard the clang of metal drop the ground. The twins, had tried stabbing and bashing the dragon with their double ended spears. They drew blood, but it was not enough to deter the monster. I snapped out of my trace just in the nick of time and shot my crossbow. This time, without paying attention to dodge out of the way, my arrow sunk into the dragon's body. It gave a satisfying shriek of agony as it jerked its head back away from the cave.

"Get away from him!" I declared. I did not even know this boy's name, but I was not going to let anyone suffer under this monster's influence ever again. I loaded another shot and fired, the beast was still too disoriented with pain to evade the shot and it sunk into flesh once more. The beast retreated, dizzy from the pain and shrieking wildly. It fled underground before I could strike at it once again. I gave a breath of relief. I had finally beaten away the monster that plagued me for so long.

The twins, approached their fallen friend, a look on their faces that reminded me of disgust. "Man, he looks gnarly." said one of them. I ran over as quickly as I could.

He was still alive. That was not something I should be cheering or celebrating. While his wooden shield had more or less protected him from most the dragon's assault, it had broken some time during the fight and had become nothing but scattered remains on the ground. One large spine had pierced his abdomen and his left hand, which he had used to protect the shield wasâ€ wrecked. It still recognizable, but covered in blood. "Did we get him?" He said. His eyes we barely open. I shuddered at the sight.

"Yeah," I lied.

"No, we didn'tâ€" I glared at the male twin to stop talking.

"Yeah, the dragon's gone," said the female.

"That's good thenâ€" Hopefully he was not able to understand. "At least my dad wouldn't say it's my fault again." No, of course not. It was my fault.

I made the decisions. I had underestimated the enemy. I might as well have been the Whispering Death myself for all the good I had done to him. The boy struggled as he tried to pull the spine out of his gut for a moment. I tried to stop him, knowing that it just would have made things worse. But for his efforts, he gave a scream of pain and exposed the bleeding wound as he removed the spine with a few hard tugs. That might have done more harm than good as began bleeding more. I wish I had studied the path of the healer now, for I did not know enough to save his life.

What was wrong with me? I was lamenting over the fact I had made one of the Herd die, a stranger. A moon ago, I would have been parading that kill as though it were a favored trophy, now I was weeping and wishing for a means to save his life. _Look how far I had fallenâ€_

But I did have one. It had been the whole point Hiccup had given it to me in the first place. I reach down to myâ€ belt and drew the cooking pot that I had been carrying around me for much of the day. It was still bizarrely warm to the touch, even though it had not touched fire for several hours at this point. With any luck, it was still potent. Hopefully, enough to save his life. I had no doubt that it would change him, but Hiccup had plans to undo the potion's effects on himself. Temporary existence as a dragon was no doubt preferable to dying wasn't it?

By now, the boy had been barely conscious and only groaning in pain. All I had to do was pour it in his mouth and he would likely survive. I did not get the chance to do so before being rudely interrupted. "Snotlout!" shouted a very familiar voice that I had not been expecting. It was Astrid. "What have you done to him?" she demanded as I turned to her. Fishlegs and Camicazi were with her, no one else. The Viking female held her trusted axe, mostly for defense, but I knew it also meant a means to threaten me. Given how close she was to me, she could end me before I could fire a shot.

"A Whispering Death did this to himâ€" "

She turned to the twins who simply nodded in confirmation. "Now, why are you going to give him _that? _I know what it is..." Astrid had protested to Hiccup's plan of allowing me to drink the potion to return myself to my Flight, but she did not actively try to prevent it.

"He's dyingâ€¦" And it was all my fault. "I want to save himâ€¦"

"Since when did you care about any of us?" She asked. It was a very valid question. Since when did I care about the fate of anyone else? Most Kin of mine, I did not care lived or died, but then again, most Kin were not threatened by death due to my mistakes.

"Does it matter?" I dodged the question.

"Yes, it does!" She responded. "You're not one of us, so why do you care about us? Any of us?"

"Becauseâ€¦ it is my fault." I admitted. She seemed to listen thoughtfully. Maybe it was just my imagination. I just had to tell her why I did this. "Listen to me, Astrid, I made a mistake, it cost him. I have to fix thisâ€¦ Hiccup aided me even when I was a mere stranger, I should be willing to do the sameâ€¦"

Astrid thought on my words for a moment. Her eyes narrowed on to mine, I stared back. Then unexpectedly, she lowered her axe. "If you give Snotlout that potion, you're going to be slowly turning him into a dragon. We all know how badly that messed with Hiccupâ€¦ Do you really want him to suffer through that?"

"It's better than dyingâ€¦ Besides, Hiccup has a plan to cure himselfâ€¦"

"And what if it doesn't work?" She asked.

I did not know the answer to that, but I knew what she was getting at. When I would give the boy the potion, he would become my responsibility, my charge. Whatever happened to him, it became my duty. "Thenâ€¦ I don't knowâ€¦ I'll tryâ€¦"

"Would youâ€¦ be around to help him? What would you be willing to give up to aid him?" I knew what she was getting at. She wanted to know how far I was willing to go to make amends.

"Thenâ€¦ I won't drink the potion for myselfâ€¦ not until he either releases me from my responsibilities or until I can undo his changesâ€¦" _Or get him to like beingâ€¦ a dragon. _I mentally added.

"Do you really mean that?" said Astrid. "Do you _swear _it?"

My King still thought I was dead and the only two who knew I was still alive was the old Gronckle who was likely swimming his way back to the Nest right now and the Whispering Death who wanted me dead. Chances were, I could afford to stay human a little while longer. After all, all it took was an arrow to turn me one of them. How hard would it be to use that same method to cure them? I nodded. "On my honor."

She seemed to consider his words for a second, I know I was doing the same for my own. Astrid knelt down by Snotlout, who was in a blood loss induced daze. I hoped that I was not too late to save him. She was looking him over and finally made her decision. "Snotlout's not going to last much longer, Toothless," I blinked. She rarely referred to me by name. Always just 'you' or some other impersonal term. "You better save him."

I knelt down to the one called Snotlout. It was strange that I knew his name only after he was nearly dead. I opened the lid of the pot, revealing the glowing mixture that was contained within. It was no longer as hot and bright as it used to, but I could feel some of that potency. I poured it gently into the boy's mouth, careful not to spill anything. It was fortunate for me that he was unconsciously swallowing it down. It took maybe a minute or so for him to drink the entire pot, which then promptly disintegrated the moment the last droplets went into his mouth. It was surprising to say the least. Hiccup had been worried that the pot would be eaten through by the potion, but that clearly did not happen until the last drops were gone. I wondered how that it worked like that, because it defied logic. Why did suddenly removing the potion destroy the pot? Power never made any senseâ€|

Of course, none of us really cared much for it. None of us, aside from Fishlegs, had ever seen the process of healing and transformation before. Our jaws were dropped in awe as we saw the wounds on Snotlout's body scab over and replace wounds with corresponding sets of scale or deep, blood red scale. The hole in Snotlout's gut had sealed itself up and merely grown a large portion of scales to cover up the wound. His left arm however, suffered a slightly more drastic change. The whole thing became covered in scales, as was expected, but the damage had also warped the hands, making nails turn into claws, and made the hand somewhat meatier. I think he might have also grown slightly larger, but that was harder to tell. He was breathing more regularly and peacefully now. He was no longer dying or dead and his face seemed to be less pale.

We stood there, silently; all contemplating what happened. Snotlout was still alive, still living. Then the silence was broken by the male of the twins, "Wow, I gotta get me one of those." It was strange, I always ran into people who were open to the idea of willing changing themselves into dragons. Granted, most of them were oddities and by traditional Viking standards, but the fact remained that they were still there.

"Yeah," replied his sister. "It's cool. Maybe we'd end up like Alvin, with those massive dagger claws of his..."

"Wait, Alvin took the potion, too!?" asked Astrid. I had forgotten to mention that since we were all so busy.

"I know," complained Camicazi, "Why is it all of the boys keep turning into dragons?" Camicazi, if she was being truthful at the time had displayed interest in being a Changewing.

"Yeah," I said, "We met Alvin earlierâ€| I don't even know what he isâ€| Massive claws, transparent skin that let you see his blood flowing around, two heartsâ€| Never heard or seen anything like thatâ€|" Which was saying something. As one of the Kin and as the son

of a Flight Commander, I naturally was educated to know and recognize each and every breed in the King's domain. Whatever this Alvin had become was outside of that knowledge.

"This could be bad, never heard of anything like that either." Fishlegs added. He was the only one I knew who probably knew as much about my Kin as could be possible without being one himself. "Aren't you supposed to know likeâ€¦ everything about dragons?"

"I'm not a bard," I replied. Bards were tasked with keeping the knowledge of the Kin, usually in song format. I wonder if the Herd had anything of that sort. "Anyways, we gotta get out of here..."

"Speaking of that What are they doing here? And why are you with them?" Astrid gestured to Snotlout and the twins.

"I met them on the beach, along with Hiccup's father and Camicazi's motherâ€¦ plus their whole fleets."

"Ooh, my mum's here?" Camicazi cheered. "Wait til she sees the things I stole while I was on vacation!" At that I gave a slight chuckle. Camicazi, to her credit, essentially had more or less free reign around Outcast Island.

"I guess the cavalry has arrivedâ€¦" Astrid said.

"So we're not doomed?" Fishlegs asked.

"Maybe, maybe notâ€¦ that Whispering Death might still be around, so stay on your guard. Say, why are you here anyways?" I asked.

"Once we got through freeing as many prisoners as we could, we tried to find an exit, but we heard someone screaming, so we came to investigateâ€¦ When we cameâ€¦ you kinda already drove the dragon awayâ€¦" Astrid told me, before instructing the others. "Fish, I recommend carrying Snotlout. Camicazi, lead the way. Ruff, Tuff, you're with meâ€¦ Uh Toothlessâ€¦ keep watch of the rearâ€¦" I blinked. That was an important task and _she_ was giving it to me. Watching the rear was an important job, one of the most important tasks in any Hunting party. Aside from that, those who were in the rear had an excellent vantage point to betray the whole group. Maybe I had already died. Why did she suddenly trust me, now? Was it because of Snotlout? More likely she didn't and thought I would get killed sooner if I was in the back. Yeah, that was a rational. Either that, or she trusted the twins _even less_ than meâ€¦ Was that even possible?

Fishlegs did as he was told and deftly picked up the sleeping part-dragon boy. Camicazi skipped ahead of the rest of the group. I brought up the rear silently watching for signs of danger and checking our rear every few steps. In the end, it did not matter Astrid's reasons for giving me this task. I would fulfill them. I was still a Squire, a warrior.

Up ahead, I could see a light. Maybe escape was just around this corner.

* * *

><p>For the first time in a month, I was using my left eye to see things. I had to discard the eye patch I had constructed from my old and now torn pants. Thankfully, Alvin had seen fit to provide me with a replacement pair, an eye patch, and a laundering service since I was such a valuable asset. The eye I had was clearly meant for a nocturnal creature, given that it had a much wider range of vision even in near complete darkness. I had to admit, that was pretty cool if a bitâ€| strange. My human eye was effectively near blind in the darkness.<p>

After Toothless had run off, I had made myself busy by opening any dragon cages as I could find. None of the other dragons seemed to even acknowledge my existence and just wanted to escape as soon as they could. Not that I could blame them, being locked up and given only enough to stay alive only to await whatever fate Alvin decided of them. I wanted to same thing.

Unfortunately for me, I had realized that I made one tiny error in my plan. I forgot to make a map. I had been so paranoid in fearing Alvin would catch on to my plans, I had forgotten to ask Camicazi to take the time to write guidelines of some sort to give me a way out. Once I had finished open the last cage I could find, which contained a lone Monstrous Nightmare that barely fit inside the cell Alvin put him in, I had realized I had wandered very far from the path that I had known. On top of that, I had no idea where any of the exits were.

So I spent what must have been a few hours, wandering in the darkness, encountering no one, dragon or Outcast. That was a mixed blessing. On one hand, I would not be in any dangerous situations or at the mercy of murderous Vikings. This was good because, I was only armed with a simple knife. On the other, I was still lost and I could not ask anyone for directions for protections.

The gods must still not have decided what to do with me. I did not know what to do with me either.

My heart almost froze when I had seen a series of lights approaching me in the tunnel up ahead. Someone was coming to me. They were either Outcasts or former slaves. If they were the former, I was doom; if they were the later, I was saved. Until I knew who they were, I needed to hide. Spotting an empty jail cell, I opted to hide behind the walls. As long as they did not look inside it, I would be free to decide what to do.

As they got closer, I began to recognize the one who was leading them. "Dad?" There was also a large blonde woman behind him, likely Camicazi's mother, Bertha. I heard stories about how many had suffocated in her embraceâ€| Camicazi did not confirm or deny those rumors. Strange how Camicazi was so small, yet her mother was so large. Then again, most of my friends were not exactly as big and buff as any of our parentsâ€|

"Hiccup?" the man in the front said. "Is that you? Where are you?" I realized that the cave was so dark that he likely could not see me without the ability to see in the dim lights. I hid my draconic eye behind my eyepatch once again.

"It's me!" I yelled. "I'm just up ahead."

"Hang on, son! We're coming to get you!"

"No dad!" I yelled in respond. I only wanted him to see what had become of meâ€¦ Assuming that I decided to show him that his son was now covering in black scales. "Just you, please!"

Even in the darkness with only one eye, I could see my father was gesturing the warriors behind him to stop. At least there were some times, when my father listen to meâ€¦ now seemed to be one of them. The gods must really be favoring me today.

As he approached the cage I was in, I told him. "In the cage."

"What're you doing there?" He said as he turned to look at me. He held a simple torch that allowed him to see that I had an eye patch and worn a pair of oversized, almost clownish boots. He was looking at them, but

"I thought you were Outcasts so I was hidingâ€¦" I replied. My father nodded, understanding.

"It's good to see you again, my son." Then my father came up close to be and wrapped one of his arms around me. The feeling was mutual. I had missed my father. Hearing those words brought some measure of relief and comfort into my body. I held him.

"I missed you too dadâ€¦"

I could hear him chuckle a little. "I've heard what you did to Alvinâ€¦" he said.

"Wait, how?"

"Oh, I met your new friend." He must have meant Toothless. "He told me everything." Everything? What did that mean. Did Toothless reveal his not so human origins or tell my father about the potion that started this mess? Then again, Toothless was not a fool. Not compared to me at least. No, I was jumping to conclusions. None of that stuff related to Alvin much at all. My dad must simply have thought he had learned everything when Toothless told him about Alvin. Still, I should learn what he had meant.

"Er, what do you mean, dad?"

"Oh nothing much, heard from your friend that you been pulling the wool over Alvin's eyes," he said, a slight grin on his face. "Nice work setting his whole island to the flame. Now, we finally have something to talk about."

I think I was blushing. My dad wasâ€¦ proud of me. And that wasn't even what I was going for in the first place. I just wanted to retrieve my book back and get as far away from Alvin as possible. I've been waiting so long to hear him tell me something like this, now he had. "Uhâ€¦ yeah."

"And by the looks of things, you and Toothless had tried hard to kill Alvin, such a shame that didn't work," my father said. It was mostly an accident and us running away from an explosion, we never really did try to kill Alvin. Well, if Toothless had not blown up the workshop,

maybe I could have done something to him, maybe. My atherh ad also confirmed that Alvin was alive, based on his word choice. Hopefully, that Outcast was nothing but a burned wreck. "Is that where you got that battle scar of your's?" He said as he looked into my eyes. He was talking about my eye patch.

"Er, no, Alvin did that to me when he caught us."

"May I see it?"

"No!" I responded abruptly. I did not want him to see my eye or any of the other parts of my body that areâ€|tainted. Not when I finally had his approval. No, he would disown me in a heartbeat if he knew. I called down slightly before adding, "I don't like to talk much about it."

"What's wrong, son? It's a battle scar. A badge of honor. You should be proud to have gotten one, especially since you got it from such a dangerous enemy."

Technically, my eye was a counted as a combat obtained injury, but I knew that it did not mark me a hero. "It's nothing I should be proud aboutâ€|"

"Oh, soâ€| Alvin gouged out your eye?"

"Er, no, not exactly." Ew, the thought of that sounded really gross. It would have been even worse if my eye _still_ regrew in the socket.

"Ohâ€| well, if it really bothers you that much, I won't force you to show it thenâ€|" I sighed at that. My father at least understood that I had to have something remain private. All I had to do was get the special arrow I gave to Fishlegs and cure myself and dad would never have to know I was a monster. And all things considered, I had earned the respect of my father and probably as a good portion of the fleet by demolishing Alvin's base of operations. Things were finally looking up for me in the world.

_I really should not have thought that. _Just as soon as I had finished my thought, some force grabbed my father and rammed his face into the nearest wall. It was Alvin and he looked â€| like a monster. That was what all I had to look forward to if I never cured myself. Alvin pinned my father into the wall, using his still mostly human left arm to do so. The potion much have made him freakishly strong. I've heard screaming in the tunnels on both sides. The Bog Burglars and Hooligans my father brought advanced cautiously as there were Outcasts around me and my father.

"Oh, Stoick, your son is such a piece of work. I've been meaning to take Heirs captive for some puny ransom, but your little disappointment delivered you right into my handsâ€|" He said as he squeezed my father's throat. My father tried to break himself free from the wall, but Alvin was just too strong.

"Damn you and your sorcery, Alvin," coughed my father.

"Oh, I wasn't responsible." said the Outcast. "Your little boy here is the one who brew the potion, that precious little elixir that made me near invincible. I think I'll have him brew a few more potions

later, might work wonders on Savageâ€¦ But for now, I think I'll slowly crush your windpipe." I was paralyzed with fear. My father was going to die and there was little I could do to stop him. On top of that, my dad now knew that I was responsible for making Alvinâ€¦ into this whatever he was.

But as Alvin's grip was slowly killing my fatherâ€¦ I realized, I would not have another chance. I drew my knife and leapt on top of the former Outcast. "Let go of my father!" I howled. I had not had melee combat training for most of my little vacation, but I still had the enhanced physical abilities granted to me by the potion. But I did not need to plunge a knife into Alvin's left shoulder blade. His hand jerked in pain and released its grip upon my father.

"How dare you!" screamed Alvin. He tried to wildly shake me off, but the tiny wings on his back proved to be a great place to grab on to. The Outcast escorts Alvin brought along were not able to reach me as their leader flung himself around like a madman. They were too scared to approach him. Eventually though, he wised up and simply grabbed my left hand and tossed me onto the floor. It hurt plenty, but it provided my father the time he needed to recover.

Before Alvin could follow up throwing me onto the ground by crushing my skull beneath his feet, my father drew his sword and rammed it through Alvin's rib cage. "I've always know you were a monster, Alvin. Now, I just have an easier time seeing it!" And with a single stroke, sliced open the monstrous Outcast's guts. Alvin toppled to the ground. I think I saw some intestines. Then as soon as my father had done away with Alvin, he picked up one of the Outcast soldiers over his head and threw him on his compatriots. This gave my father enough time to pick me up and make off with me.

"We are leaving!" he yelled to his men and Bertha's women. Bog Burglars only allowed women to be warriors. "Fall back to the main entry way." Given the size of the forces involved, dad likely wanted to move to a more defensible position. My dad might be a Viking, but he knew plenty strategy and tactics. His objective was me, therefore he had to ensure my safety. He might have also felt that these conditions, this dark tunnel was too dangerous a place to put me under.

"Well, you heard him, time to go!" Bertha shouted in compliance.

I groan in pain. My back hurt. I had no time or willingness to resist my father picking me up and hauling me over his shoulder. This gave me a perfect view of the Outcast chasing after us and the warriors who were guarding our escape.

It also allowed me to see Alvin standing up from the large gut wound my father had given him. I could see his eye, white pinpricks of hate focus at me intently. I wanted to scream and yell that Alvin was still alive, but my throat felt heavy. That throw Alvin did to me, must have hurt more than I thought if I was suffering from it this badly. I just hoped it would not lead to any drastic changesâ€¦ I could feel my back getting better, recovering. Hopefully, dad thinks that me being in tip top shape after being thrown by Alvin is a miracle from Freya or Baldur and not the results of a magic potion. Though given that Alvin told my dad about it, it was only a matter of time he figured it out.

Given that no one else seemed to be taking note of Alvin rising out of a pool of his own blood, it was clear they were too busy fighting to notice.

We had arrived at the main entry way, which was a tunnel that was slightly larger than any of the others I had seen on my stay here. Being on Outcast Island for a month, I had seen far too many tunnels for my liking. There was also a rather large pile of rubber and stone in the main hallway. I wondered what could have possibly made that. My father set me against a wall some distance away from where my father intended the confrontation to take place. "You stay safe son, your dad's only going to be busy for a few more minutes." At this moment, I heard Outcasts fighting against Bog Burglars and Hairy Hooligans at around the entrance to the tunnel we just left.

"Alvin's alive," I finally managed to groan. The pain in my back was finally subsiding and thankfully, I did not grow wings or a tail or something.

"What?" my father gasped.

"He's still alive," I wheezed. "I saw him get up when we made our escape."

I saw my father's face turn pale. For the first time in my life, I had seen him legitimately afraid. He had just disemboweled Alvin after all and for most people and dragons, that was a death sentence. To not only live from that, but also stand up from such a life threatening injury shocked him to the core. Whatever the potion I drank was, it was clearly potent if it allowed a man to survive that. "I don't believe you," my father said. I didn't want to believe me either. "Alvin can't have survived, let alone stood from that."

"Alvin isn't human anymore," I said, my voice becoming more even, steady.

"How do we kill him?" he asked me.

That was a very good question. Alvin was going to hunt us down and even if we escaped, that would not stop him from just invading Berk while being seemingly invincible. How does one stop a rampaging half-dragon half-Viking monstrosity that could heal from just about anything? I thought about that for a moment, realizing that I already had the answer.

"We make him human againâ€|" I said.

My father looked at me skeptically. "How do you intend to do that?"

"Fishlegs has it," I told him. "If we find him, we can turn Alvin human againâ€|"

"Now why would Fishlegsâ€| have that?" He questioned. I was keeping too many secrets hidden from him and now he was getting suspicious. It was only a matter of time before he realized truth. And just killed me. Iâ€| had to come clean. I had to admit the truth. My dad deserved better than me anyways.

"Because dad," I said, my tone even. I was no longer struggling to speak, no longer dizzy from the pain of being thrown like a rag doll. I stood. I was Hiccup the Useless. I was the weakest and least physically fit Viking on Berk. I should not be able to stand up, yet I did. I lifted my eye patch, showing him the reason I had waned to hide it. "I'm not human anymore, either."

"My son," my father said, his tone of confusion and revulsion. He used his free hand to reach to my face and touch the faint coating of scale. I did not deny him this time. He wanted it all to be a trick of the eyes, nothing but an illusion. I dreamed it was that way too. "What has happened to you?"

"Alvin and I both drank potions that would make us stronger." I said. "And before you ask when and why, that stuff does not really matter right now. Point is, I've been researching on a way to fix this." I pointed at my dragon eye ball.

My father's look had become rather grim. I was expecting him to banish me or execute me any moment now. I was a disgrace, a monster. Every bit of it just like Alvin. "Son," he said in the most serious tone he could manage. "We'll talk about this later, alright?" I nodded. "Then, all we need to do is find your old friend, Fishlegs. Let's go."

I put my eye patch back on my face again and turned my attention to battle at the doorway.

The battle was starting to look grim. I could tell the men (and women) had become demoralized when I started to hear the warrior's shouts of, "Alvin lives!" followed by questions of "How is that possible?", then followed by shouts of "Kill him again!". It was a good thing that I told my father about Alvin when I could, as he was not shocked to the core seeing that the unkillable monster that was Alvin.

Alvin had gotten a lot considerably more dragon-like in the span of what must have been a half hour. He was practically covered head to toe in that freaky transparent scale that let you see veins and arteries. His wings had become somewhat larger as well. He fought against Hooligan and Bog Burglar warriors using his clawed right hand in conjunction with his axe wielding relatively human left hand. With both of these weapons, he tore through the lines of warriors as though they were butter. Many fathers and mothers were going to eat at Odin's side tonight.

"Bertha!" my father said. "We need to talk!"

"Oh finally, you decide to show up, once the hard parts has been done and over with." Shouted Bertha, who had more or less been commanding the battle since I distracted my dad. "And why retreat, Outcasts are dropping like flies.

"Alvin's some sort of monster now and he's tearing through our ranks like they were not even there." my father said. "My son's got an idea that'd take Alvin down."

"No," Bertha turned to me. "It was your fault my Camicazi ended up in Alvin's hands. I'm not going to forgive that, that easily."

Hopefully, Camicazi could convince her of how thoroughly she enjoyed her stay in Alvin's care.

"Look, I just need to find Fishlegs," I told her. "I need you to buy as much time as possible."

Bertha snorted. "Well, if that's all you needâ€¦" She turned to her warriors. "Bogs! We exit the cavern on my mark! Perpare"

"Hooligans, we take this fight to the mouth of the cave along with Bertha! Hold the line until we fall back." My father shouted. I saw the reason of what my father's plan was. He planned to use numerical superiority to wear down a significantly stronger opponent. Aside from that, I did not know if Alvin could survive a direct hit from dedicated siege weapons. Maybe that silver arrow would be redundant. My father pointed at down the tunnel. "That's the main entrance, you better take that route out. If anyone's found your friends, they'll be out there!" said my father.

I ran out the direction my father instructed. The Viking warriors were slowly following me out there. The unfortunate thing about mismatched legs is that it causes their owner to have a really awkward time moving. I had gotten used to one of them being... different in the past month, but they still made me fall and trip every now and again. Such as right now, a very important moment where ever second counted. I fell, just at mouth of the tunnel. I had dreamed about seeing the daylight for the first time in a month and now, here it was. I did not time to enjoy it, I had work to do.

"Hiccup!" cried a few voices. I looked up and I saw the source. It was my friends. The ones that I had spent the past month in the same room with. It was a relief to finally see that they were fine. Toothless held one of the last crossbows we had made together, Astrid had her axe, Camicazi fashioned her sword, and Fishlegsâ€¦ was carrying a dozing Snotlout who was wrapped in a heavy blanket. Tuffnut and Ruffnut were also here and they were having a little brawl. I wondered how they got here. I decided I would ask them later, right now was not the time.

"Guys!" I said, "Alvin's coming." This got everyone's attention, including the twins, who just froze mid fight. I looked around and seen that a makeshift sort of base camp had gathered around the tunnel entrance. I also got the attention of at least a few dozen warriors. "Fishlegs, we need that arrow of mine."

"But aren't you going to use it onâ€¦ yourself?" he muttered that last part squeamishly.

"Yes, Alvin's coming. My dad's slowing him down right now, but I need that arrow," I told him. "It's our only shot to kill Alvin."

Astrid stepped in. "Well, you heard him. This place is about to become a war zoneâ€¦" Not that it technically wasn't already. "Anyone who isn't willing to fight," She looked at Fishlegs intently, I knew him enough he did not like to fight if he could avoid it. "Or had more important responsibilities, should step outâ€¦" Fishlegs nodded and pulled out the arrow from his belt and handed it to Astrid. It was still in good condition. At that point, Fishlegs carried Snotlout, still wrapped up in that blanket, out of the area and to

the ships docked on the beach.

"You want me to handle it?" asked Toothless to Astrid.

"Yes. Toothless, you're our marksman, the moment Alvin show up you take him down." I blinked. Astrid was trusting Toothless to shoot Alvin? Was I in a dream again? While, I was slapping myself to make sure I had not gone completely bonkers, the shield maiden handed the former dragon the silver arrow.

Normally, someone would reprimand a teenager like Astrid for barking orders to older and more experienced Viking warriors, but given that she was doing a relatively good job, no one minded. That plus, she was more or less one of the best Vikings in my age bracket. She had a lot of fans.

"Hiccup!" cried a voice in the cave. My father was speaking to me. "We can't hold them much longer, we're pulling out now!"

Warriors came pouring out of the entrance, mostly the wounded at first. Slowly, progressively less injured warriors followed them, only stopping when those who had barely had a scratch or who were too stubborn exiting the tunnels. This meant that Bertha and my father were the last ones to leave, as they were both.

Me and my friends held our breaths. All of our gazes had turned towards the entrance. I had a sword that I had pulled from a crate somewhere. I was not going to abandon my friends, not here, not ever. It was my plan, my idea, my mess that had started this all. I had to see it through. My father and Bertha were right beside us. It was now or never.

The first one out was Alvin, as was to be expected. He had not changed much at all. It was likely he was just so lethal that no one hurt him much since I did. Toothless did not hesitate to shoot him, aiming for one of his hearts. I had to admit, for a former dragon, he was a very good shot. Unfortunately for me, Alvin was better at defending. He caught the arrow and stopped it from entering into his chest. He laughed as he tossed it aside. "You think a puny arrow could kill Alvin the Treacherous? Well, we'll see about that. Outcasts, charge!" At the sound of his voice, Outcasts began pouring out of the cave entrance. Alvin, himself, began running at my a battle to meet my father and Bertha in combat.

Mostly, I was just defending Toothless as shot at Outcasts with his crossbow. Astrid was beside me and knocking the living day lights out of two swordsmen at once. The twins attacked the same foes in unison and knocked them off balanced. Meanwhile Camicazi, ran through the ranks and grabbed the attention of any warriors that could be annoyed by her taunts, just to provide others with an opening to attack. Even in the midst of all this, I had enough time to make an important observation.

There was no finesse or strategy in this action, Alvin was attacking us from a position of weakness. Outcasts poured out from the main entrance and only the main entrance. There was no back attacks, no sabotage, no nothing. Meanwhile, the Hooligans and Bogs set up a defensive formation all around the cave entrance, giving a favorable position advantage to our side. Every two Outcast warriors would be facing three Hairy Hooligans and or Bog Burglars. Alvin must have

really thought he was invincible if he was making a strategic error like that.

Which was very close to the truth. Alvin was fighting both my dad and Bertha without any back up. He was too strong for them and simply did not care about injuries. Every cut my father or Camicazi's mother landed on him rapidly healed away and just made Alvin that much more lethal. At the rate they were going, Alvin would murder them if I did not act now. They were just barely hanging on, making slices and lunges, only for their attacks to be not as effective as they hoped.

"Guys, Alvin's wearing my dad and Bertha down, we have to help them!" I called out to them. Astrid and Toothless were the first to take notice. The others listened in at around the same time.

"Kinda busy right here!" cried Astrid she said as she evaded a blow from a sword and followed up with a counter attack. That felled the warrior. "Okay, so what's the plan?"

"We get that arrow and hit Alvin with it!" I said. I had a clear idea of where Alvin had thrown the arrow. With any luck it had not been trampled on. Unfortunately, it was very close to the battle where between the two masters of warfare and a monster. Ruffnut, Tuffnut, annoy any Outcasts that gets in our way." It was a dangerous situation and as crazy as the twins were, I did not want to be responsible for killing them. But at the very least, I knew they would enjoy this task.

"You're in luck, you're asking the world's most annoying man!" Tuffnut said as he charged ahead, drawing the attention of any Outcasts by making faces and rude remarks.

"Pft, I'm the world's most annoying woman," added Ruffnut, who also did the same thing. "That'sâ€ better than most annoying man right?"

I just shook my head. The twin's distractions apparently worked well enough to allow us to pass through a column of what must have been fifteen Outcasts relatively unmolested.

"Astrid, Camicazi, buy us some time!" I told the two lookalikes. They leapt into the sword fight against Alvin. If anyone else was skilled enough to fight that monster and live to tell the tale, it was them. For the most part, I could see that their addition helped the adults by drawing as much attention from the Outcast Chief.

I began searching the area around near the fight against Alvin, Toothless did not need orders. He was guarding me and began shooting at anyone that got the wrong ideas. And just then, I had found it. The silver arrow, the one that I had made just so I could become myself again. Now, I was going to make Alvin a mere man once more. So far, this impromptu plan was working.

That was when things just started going wrong. I felt a sharp pain enter my rear. I groaned in pain as some unknown force struck the base of my spine. "Hiccup!" I heard everyone I knew call around me.

"I knew you'd that! You're too predictable sometimes, you know that?"

Alvin laughed. "I don't know what's so special about that arrow of your's, but my trusty axe don't like it!" I could barely turn my body enough to see what was happening. It should be fairly obvious that it hurt. Apparently, the sudden viciousness and surprise of my injury had brought pause to the conflict between the Chiefs and us kids. More than any other physical injury I ever receive. And the worst part of it was, I knew I would get better. I knew I would change, I knew I would survive. Right here, where everyone could see it.

Yelling, Astrid had lunged at him with her axe in a strike full of anger and vengeance. But it was all for naught. Alvin, stopped the axe mid swing, grabbing the blade, not even caring the blood that splattered down on the ground. With a kick, he shoved Astrid down on the ground, holding her axe in her hand. And then with a single motion of his powerful claws, he split the axe's head into two gnarled pieces. Astrid's face gone pale as she seen the last reminder of a long dead uncle fall uselessly into the ground. She was devastated.

That tore it. I did not care anymore. If I was to be a monster, then so be it. I was going to kill Alvin, even at the cost of my humanity. No one hurt my friends like that, especially not Astrid. I then began struggling to yank Alvin's axe out of my buttocks. It was fortunate that it was angled in a way just so that I could reach it.

I saw Toothless in the mean time fire a normal arrow at Alvin. Alvin could not evade or catch it this time as he was too preoccupied with trying to fend off Bertha, Camicazi, and my father. It pierced his left arm. Alvin gave a slight groan of pain as he found that his still human arm fell limply on his sides. Hastily, the Outcast tore the arrow from his flesh, again throwing it on the ground. With his left arm incapacitated for the time being, that gave the other combatants enough time to keep the pressure on him.

I had finally tore the axe from my rear, I gave a scream of pain. I held Alvin's axe in my left hand with the arrow in my right. Toothless was too busy to be of any help, so now I had only myself to strike down Alvin. That was fine by me. Camicazi and Bertha apparently had the same fighting style that revolved around trash talking and demeaning the enemy at a thousand words a minute. My father made precise strikes with his sword, using the two Bog Burglars to provide openings. That all ended when the left arm was healed and transformed. It became a perfect copy of the right, a clawed monstrosity that was powerful enough to tear even steel apart.

With his new found weapon, Alvin found it was much easier to defend than ever before. He turned the tables, pressuring all three melee combatants away from him. One by one, he shattered their weapons, just as he did with Astrid. Each time, it only got easier. To make up for the loss of his sword, my father picked up a wooden plank and started to bludgeon him with it. Astrid in the meantime, finally snapped out of the trance that the loss of her axe brought her and started throwing rocks against the monster. Toothless, though his crossbow was unharmed had run out of ammunition and started to join in with Astrid.

At this time, I felt my legs once again. I could also feel something slowly growing on the base of my spine, a new appendage. I had been

fearing this for a long time, but it would not matter. Not now. I stood, much to the shock of anyone who did not already know of my secret. I screamed the pathetic little scream that I had, and charged at Alvin, brandishing his axe.

I knew the charge was doomed to failure from the beginning. Even though both of us had drank the potion, I was still much younger and much weaker than my enemy. Alvin didn't so much as deign to fight me. Instead he just sheathed, yes sheathed his claws and grabbed me by the neck. "Shouldn't you be a cripple for life, boy?" he asked. He pulled his axe away from my hands in a single motion. This again stopped my father, Bertha, and my friends from attacking the Outcast.

"Just as much as you should be treating third degree burns." I told him, barely able to speak with his hold over my throat. The thing about expecting failures, is that since you know that they fail, you make plans to put them to your advantage. I jabbed Alvin's arm with my silver arrow. He dropped me on the ground as green flames, the same fires that I had seen consume Toothless when we had first met surrounded him.

I was expecting him to return to human form so that my father could beat him. Instead though, I saw something worse. The fire was not as fast and far spreading as the one I had seen on Toothless that night. Instead, this fire had only consumed the Outcast's pirate's arm and parts of his sides. The fire subsided quickly, revealing what had happened. Alvin had not become human at all. Instead, it seemed like the parts of his body that were consumed by the magical fire were starting to fall apart. The hand-paw hybrid thing that had grabbed hold of me had dropped to the floor. "Damn you, boy," spat Alvin, cringing his teeth. Apparently, this state causing him great pain and best part was it was not healing. At least, not super quickly as it would have before the arrow.

"Alvin!" cried one of the Outcast warriors in the far back, a smaller looking man than most Outcasts. "We have to get you of here. Outcasts, defend Alvin!" At that moment the Outcasts that had survived the battle were all converging their location towards Alvin and me. They blocked me from my friends and family.

"Just a moment, Savage, I just need to give them a little something to distract them with..." I could see Alvin was eying my legs. He placed his huge, muscled feet on my knee caps. I want to forget what happened there. It hurt plenty. So not only was I starting to grow the stub of a tail, I was also going to need new legs.

My father called to me, "Hiccup!" By the time he had got to me, the Outcasts had already left me on the ground. He held me, looking into my eye to see if I was still there. He was falling right into Alvin's plan. If he had killed me, my father would have followed him until he killed Alvin, but doing this he made sure that my father would stay behind. There must have been a proverb somewhere that described this scenario. Alvin could have taken me hostage again, but given the damage I caused him, he likely did not want to change it.

"I'm alright dad," I coughed. Some Bogs and Hooligans followed after them, but chances were, Alvin was going to get time enough to lick his wounds. "I just need to rest a bit..." I looked him with my sole exposed eye, tired of the day. Tired of the fighting. Tired of the

struggle. I just wanted to get some restâ€¦ I fell asleep in my father's arms.

* * *

><p>Oh and for those of you who guessed Alvin has become an "Exterminator", you deserve a cookie. Mind you, I am taking a few artistic liberties.

Alsoâ€¦ this scene has been planned from the beginning. The reason why Toothless became human, yet Alvin gotâ€¦ what he got when they were shot by the arrows is something that was planned from the beginning. It'll all make sense once certain elements become present.

And wow, that's the longest Hiccup snippet I ever made.

Please remember to read and review. Each review promotes this story and encourages others to read it.

8. Chapter 8

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Going to be taking a break it seems while I iron out the plot for the next story few arcs. So this update is the last for maybe few weeks or so.

**Enjoy this story and please remember to review.
>

* * *

><p>Men were men. Women were sort of men, too. And even some babies had chest hair. But I had a hard time believing in a world where men were dragons. When I had seen Alvin, all scaled up and armed with claws, I made the assumption that some dark powers had twisted him into some sort of monster. I could not believe my son had been the one responsible nor could I believe he was perhaps going to be monstrous as Alvin had becomeâ€¦<p>

And the worst part of it all was what I could not yet confirm or deny, but I had my suspicions. I was no fool and I was perfectly capable of figuring things out for myself; granted, I still failed to find Hamish the Second's treasure, but that man was a genius. No, I understood perfectly what caused my son to go down this road the moment he said that the potion that caused this madness granted strength. After all, what would a boy want after being told for so long how weak he was? I hoped my answer to that question was wrong.

I was on a ship, one that was still landed on the island's many beaches. Night had fallen and Alvin and what remained of his Outcasts had vanished from the island, without any clues to their whereabouts, not that I was in any condition to follow them. My son's condition was far more important to me than killing that monster. I needed time to lick my wounds and head home. And I needed time to think on and decide my son's fate with the Hooligan Tribal Council. The things

that had happened here, this day, were world shattering.

It was a mostly private moment with the only exceptions being my son's friends who sat by his side, watching him for any sign of movement. Hiccup, my son, was unconscious laying in a pile of rags that served as a mat. He was stripped almost naked, save for the article that would preserve his modesty. It was grotesque and horrifying, made worse because it was my own flesh and blood there. Alvin had crushed my son's knees so thoroughly that he severed the legs. It was no surprise then that the blood loss had caused my son to turn pale and faint by the time I had reached him.

Unfortunately, I was not the only one who knew the truth now. When my son revealed to me his eye this morning, he did not do so in private. Due to desperation and carelessness, he had also informed several others in that tunnel, others that he had forgotten to take account of and only stood there silently while the battle raged on. On top of that, that stunt my son pulled when heâ€¦ did whatever he did to Alvin did not go unnoticed. No one, especially not a weak, ninety pound boy could easily stand after having an axe plunge that deep into his rear. And that was before the healers performed a medical examination that revealed what happened to my son's body. They knew him as the source of Alvin's power, but also as the one who defeated him.

If it was not for the fact that my son had stopped Alvin in this battle, I had no doubt that that there would have been several attempts at his life at this point. I could tell that several of my men were uncomfortable with the idea that one of their own, especially one that was my son, was almost as much of a creature as Alvin. The only things that stopped them from acting was my son's bravery and heroism and their respect of me.

The same went for Snotlout. My nephew was next to my son, also dozing off. Fishlegs had attempted to hide what my nephew had undergone, but more senior and experienced healers had insisted rather forcefully to examine the boy. They were surprised to say the least. According to Toothless, Hiccup had prepared a second potion in the event someone was going to end up critically injured. Unfortunately, that person was Snotlout. I was glad that his father was too busy pillaging/salvaging what was left of Alvin's fortress to take notice. I did not know how my brother would react.

Currently, it was dinner time. I did not have much, admittedly. It was just some bread and some soup with some alcohol to wash it down, but it was practically a feast for my son's friends given their somewhat meager portions. "That was the best hostage crisis I have ever been, too!" Chirped Bertha's daughter. "We not only stole everything in sight, but we also stole the whole island!" Her mother was just smiling in approval, hiding her true feelings on the matter. Normally, I would not allow the Bog Burglars aboard my ship, but given how that girl was essentially my son's right hand, I had to give her a little credit. It was also very strange that I had never realized how she and that Hofferson girl looked so much alike.

"I still can't believe we did itâ€¦" said Fishlegs, my son's oldest friend. The blonde boy was feeding my son and my nephew with a few spoonfuls of soup, taking care to ensure they are able to swallow it unconsciously. "Everything was just so crazy!"

"Yeah, tell me about it!" said one of the twins, the male.

"Everything was just so perfect!" Ruffnut said.

"So much destruction!"

"So much chaos!"

"I even got to steal some guy's skull from his head!" The male of the pair then proudly displayed a bone bleached white skull. Hopefully, they were just talking about a decorative skull that had been used as part of a helmetâ€¦ not actually taking it from someone's actually body.

"What do you mean you took it?" Said the girl twin as she slapped her brother. "It was me!"

"No, I did it!" I observed the male retaliating, by shoving a loaf of bread into his twin's mouth. I had seen this enough times to usually figure out not to get involved. I took a bite of my loaf of bread, curious as to who would win this time.

"Doâ€¦ they always do this?" asked Toothless, only staring at the scene before him. He probably wondered why no one was bothering to get involved.

"Yes," I said. "Let them be, this is how they are." At least they were not destroying things.

"And I thought Zipplebacks were weirdâ€¦" was his only reply. I chuckled. Of course, comparing the twins to a two headed dragon was deeply humorous and rather ironic. Zippleback heads are known for how cooperative they are to each other. Overall, my son had done a well to get someone like him.

"You got that right," I laughed. At this point, I saw the twins trying to eat their soup while tied upside down to the ship's mast. Apparently they were doing some sort of eating contest now. I don't know whether or not I should have intervened. More important was how they got up there in the small time frame I had been speaking with Toothless?

While they were they were distracted, Camicazi stepped in. "I'll be taking that!" she exclaimed as she walked over and picked up the skull that the twins were fighting over.

"Hey, that's ours!" said the twins. The duo then leapt off of the mast, with more agility that you'd think them to be capable of it.

"Pft, I stole it fair and square!" Camicazi said as she walked off. They immediately began running after the Bog Burglar. Then Bertha went and followed them, apparently interested in wanting to see the crime.

"What just happened?" asked Toothless.

"Don't bother thinking about it too muchâ€¦" I said. "They're just doing what is in their natureâ€¦" The explanation seemed to cause the

boy's eyes to question me slightly. "Just eat your dinner, it doesn't really matter."

"Alright," the boy said, taking his bowl of soup. If there had to be any faults to the boy, it had to be his table manners. Granted, us Vikings did not really care much about thing such as table etiquette, especially when we did not use tables. Toothless on the other hand was lapping his soup rather noisily while getting the contents poured all over his tunic. Then he wiped his face with his forearm. I did not know whether or not I should be appalled or impressed by his absolute lack of table manners. "All done," said the boy. He must have been raised by animals or something.

Fishlegs laughed a hearty laugh at that sight. Astrid, who had remained silent up until now, also blew up laughing from Fishlegs's laughter. Toothless glowered at them both. I joined in the laughing fit. "You look ridiculous, boy." That's what happened when someone was covered in soup and eating like a wild animal. He blushed, realizing his own embarrassment. I handed him a fresh change of clothes and a towel. "Get yourself cleaned up."

Toothless nodded and walked off the boat, surprisingly Astrid followed. "I'm going to make sure he doesn't get into any trouble." I nodded in response.

That just left me and Fishlegs with the unconscious pair of boys. I heard a groaning and turned towards my son, hoping he was waking. Instead, I had Snotlout stirring in his sleep. No surprise, his injuries were far less severe than my son's, so it made sense he would be awaking first.

He grunted in frustration, fluttering his eyes a few times to remove the sleepiness. "Gahâ€|" he groaned.

"Hey, take it easy," said Fishlegs, withdrawing the spoonful of soup, only for the boy to grab it and take a sip. "You almost got yourself killedâ€|"

"Oh. Well, that's great. You're not exactly my idea of a Valkyrieâ€|" he said, rather pompously. Apparently, being nearly dead is not a concern for my cousin. I just chuckled, at least he was taking it in stride. He took the bowl of soup and started digging into it, apparently very hungry. "Hey, wait," he said between mouthfuls. Bad manners is a Viking thingâ€|" "Where's that kid, Fruitless or whatever it was, did he make it?"

"Well, yeah," said Fishlegs, while taking another bowl and spoon to Hiccup. "According to him and the twins, he drove that Whispering Death away."

I decided to step in "It's just thatâ€|" well, you almost didn'tâ€|"

"What? I feel fine! Better than ever, reallyâ€|" he complained. He waved his left arm, the one that had changed, around in protest.

I decided to look at the arm intently. My nephew may be thick at times, but that's due to the fact that he's a normal Viking. "That's because there were steps taken to make sure that you are fine." I had been informed by Fishlegs that the potion or whatever it was

dramatically increased healing abilities. It was what allowed _that monster _to survive as it did. He was no longer Alvin the Treacherous to me.

He got the hint and paid close attention to the fact his hand was now covered in scales. His face contorted into an expression of shock and disbelief. It hurt me to break his little delusion of peak performance. "Am I likeâ€¦ Alvinâ€¦?" he gasped unsure and frightened.

"Yes." I said. I had to comfort him, but I did not have to be soft about it. We were Vikings, not lily-livered Romans or Frenchmen. "You're much like what Alvin isâ€¦ becoming part dragon though some sort of magicâ€¦"

He looked unsure of himself for a moment, gathering his thoughts and examining just how much he changed. "Oh, man, we gotta hide this before dad sees it... I'm so disowned now!" Suddenly, I understood why my son had been so insistent on hiding his deformity when we had first met in those tunnels. Just how was a parent supposed to react to their children becoming partly dragon _creatures_? What is the right thing to do here? To love your child because he is cursed or to _disown _and_ banish _ your child because he was cursed? History and storytelling is rife with anecdotal evidence making for both cases to be valid options.

"Don't be ridiculous," I was almost lying through my teeth. "Your father's not going to disown you." Actually, I had no idea if my brother would disown my nephew, especially since I was not sure on the whole matter myself with my son. On the one hand, our children were becoming half dragon abominations. On the other, Alvin was able to fight no less than two elite warriors and two fighting prodigies who were given archery support _and win_ before my son got involved. This just made it more difficult to label their condition as an outright curse, since it placed their current state in a category that was more reserved for mixed blessings.

"Really?" he said hopefully.

"Yeah," I hoped. "Just take it easy."

"Pft, as if. If I'm like Alvin, maybe I should try seeing what this new arm of mine can do," Snotlout leapt out of the bed. "Maybe it can crush rocks with my barehandsâ€¦" At least he was being optimistic.

"Just word of advice," said Fishlegs, his tone was strangle professional and cold. "Try not to hurt yourselfâ€¦ or you'll end up like Hiccup." Snotlout froze for a moment and turned to my son, still laying down unconscious and half naked. He could clearly see what the blond boy was getting at. "Every single hurt and injury, even the smallest, just makes you that much closer toâ€¦ wellâ€¦ whatever it is you're turning intoâ€¦" The normally pompous Viking boy quietly nodded before heading off into the night. He hid arm in some bandages, not that it would do any good, as it was likely everyone knew about it by now. Hopefully, he'd be safe.

In the mean time, I went and picked up a charcoal pen and some paper. I needed to decide what position I would take regarding my son, so I began listing the pros and cons.

Maybe it would be better, for his sake, to exile him? He would not be putting up with the needless suffering and persecution he would get if he was stuck on an island which already say him as a failure. I would not want him away, but it may be for the best.

Or maybe I should keep him around? Alvin was elevated to a more greater danger and my son was the only reason I was still alive today. It would mean that I could always keep an eye on him, but that mean he was going to practically be imprisoned in his own home.

Would it be good for the whole tribe though? My son was practically abomination. And it might only get worse. Would I wake up one day and find that my son would throw his lot with the dragons and betray his own people?

This decision was hard. If Val was here, maybe she would have an easier time guiding me in the right direction. She always knew what to do. However, as I could only ask things of the living, Gobber probably had better advice and so did Gothi. No matter what, I needed to present my case and decision before the other leaders in the village.

There was also the matter of Alvin. I had a duty to warn the other Tribes, no matter how much I loathed some of them, that the Outcast had been elevated to a monster worth of a saga. With his new found power, he could probably destroy an entire village caught unawares.

Thankfully, my son's destruction of Outcast Island provides me with an easy diplomatic advantage. It's a good thing that Alvin takes captives from wherever he can. I just needed to figure out where each of them came from.

* * *

><p>I guided Toothless a short distance away from where the ships were docked, some place far away enough away for some privacy. Hopefully, no one was watching us, no one needed to know Toothless really was a dragon. Made worse by the fact I had not informed anyone about the truth. I knew Hiccup was not going to tell his father, Fishlegs and Camicazi weren't speaking about it out of respect, and Snotlout and the twins did not know at all from what I gathered. The only reason I am keeping my mouth shut was because I wanted to have some questions answered.<p>

I will admit, I do not trust that boy completely, but I know he isn't outright against us. Anymore. Maybe that had to do with a certain boy. Aside from that, I could see he was desperate to make amends for a complete stranger. I wasn't so paranoid and unreasonable to think that he was actively trying to convert some of us Vikings to his causeâ€¦ at least, not right now. _Honest._

The decision to save Snotlout was the hardest choice I had made in my life. Not only because I knew what it would cost _him_, _but also what it would cost _me_. _ I trusted a dragon to save someone I knew and it worked exactly as we both expected to work. Dragons should not have been capable of guilt, making amends for their crimes, or of self-sacrifice. They also were not supposed to talk, think, or learn

how to work in a smithy, but I've gone over that in the past month already. Now I was in a world where dragons were surprisingly _human, _more than even some actual humans. That ignorance something I could never have back. Maybeâ€|

"You don't have to follow me you know," his words broke me out of my thinking. Which was good, I did not want to know where that train of thought was going.

"I'm just making sure you won't get into any troubleâ€|" I said. Not that I cared about him or anything.

"I thought you trusted me," he snorted. As he stepped closer to the water, his feet sank gently into the soft, wet sand of the beach.

"Not that muchâ€| Hey, wait, what are you doing?" I saw him bend down and without hesitating, take a sip directly out of the salty, sandy waters.

Toothless choked for a bit before spitting it out. "This water's horrid! It's too salty."

"That's because it's _sea water, _you idiot! People don't drink sea water."

"Then where do you get enough to drink?" He complained. I kept spitting out the taste of salt from his mouth. "There's water everywhere and you humans can't drink it?"

"Mostly we use rivers and lakes, sometimes we use wellsâ€|" I stated flatly. I took a small amount of pleasure in his suffering, enough to feel slightly guilty.

"And I was so looking forward to the taste of sea water again," he complained. "I've gotten tired of the stale water, Alvin kept giving us."

"Get used to it," I said. Of all the things to complain about, he chooses the ability to not drink _sea waterâ€|_ I guess a dragon's priorities were still strange. "You gotâ€| well, you knowâ€|" I did not want to rub it in, but I needed to answer some questions. I knew what he was going to respond with next.

"Don't remind me," he said as he stepped closer to the water. "I thought those arrows were supposed to wellâ€| turn dragons into people. And Hiccup and I assumed that also applied to anyone who drank those potion. None of us expect it cause the flesh to combust and rot. I was hoping that Hiccup could just cure himself and Snotlout without much workâ€| now I'mâ€| stuck like this."

"Soâ€| you aren't going to break your promise?" I asked him. I was asking him about his pledge to save Snotlout this morning. Back then, everyone else had all thought Hiccup was going to have an easy time turning himself human again. Now though, I needed to see where his loyalties lie. The fact that I am assuming him to be _honest_ is telling.

"No!" he protested, furiously. "That'sâ€| unthinkable." I squinted my eyes. Why exactly it unthinkable? "I'm not going against my word, not

like that. I am not an Oath Breaker." I guess dragons really did regard their honor rather highly if they had a title or name to refer someone who literally broke oaths. Vikings also understood that people who break their vows and oaths are not to be trusted readily.

"I'm guessing you're not going to go running off somewhere even though you said you would." When we had first met on that boat, he had said that his intentions were that once he was free, he would go off on his own. I wanted to know if that still held true.

"No, that would get in the way of my oath to aid Snotlout."

"And don't you have any Oaths to your kind? Won't they miss you from preforming them?"

"I do, but it is completely impossible for me to do any of them for now. Aside from that, only Hiccup can brew the potion I need. And even then I'm not sure if it would work as I hope it wouldâ€¦"

"What gives you that idea?"

"Alvin had both taken a potion and had been harmed by the arrowsâ€¦ I don't know what would happen to me if I would take the potion myselfâ€¦ so not going to chance it until it's safe." I nodded, it made sense. It might have been a little cowardly, but at least the dragon was playing things smart. Of course, that was when I remembered the reason why we were here in the first place.

"We better get you cleaned up, you're starting to smellâ€¦" Toothless stepped forward into the water, submerging himself to his knees. I instructed him to remove his ragged and submerge it in the water, rinsing out the soup stains and stench with salty water. I told him to come back, after thinking his trousers and tunic were soaked thoroughly enough by the waves.

After coming out of the water and retreating towards drier sands, Toothless sat some distance away from the shoreline. He draped his wet tunic over his left shoulder. "Mind if we talked a bit more?" he said to me.

"Sure, I've got some things I wanted to ask you." I intended to do so in the first place. I sat down beside him.

At this, the dragon nodded and looked up at the sky above. "Soâ€¦ what I want to know isâ€¦ what's the big deal with that axe of yours?"

I blinked, his first question caught me completely off guard. I thought it would be something important, instead he asks me about my axe of all things. "Why, whatever do you mean?"

"I don't claim to know much about you or how you Vikings regard your weapons, but I don't understand why you're still keeping such a useless object on your personâ€¦" He was referring to my axe. The axe that Alvin had so callously crushed and torn apart this afternoon. Currently, I kept its pieces on my person, hoping that I might get a smith to fix it. I knew Hiccup would do it.

I was furious. No one insulted my axe. "My axe isn't useless," I

protested. "That's a stupid question."

"Well, then what is it, then?" he asked. "I don't think even Hiccup could repair it now. It's better to just throw it away or melt it down. The others have done the same with their weapons."

"My axe is my axe. I'm not going to throw it away just because everyone else throws away their weapons!"

"What makes your axe so special?"

"Because it was a gift to me." One belonging to a long dead Fearless Finn, courtesy of one Flightmare.

"Big deal, Hiccup gave me dozens of crossbows back when we were in Alvin's clutches," he stated flatly. "Why does that make it so special?" He clearly did not understand the value of objects that well. Maybe he wasn't so bright as I thought he was. I needed to explain it to him, in a way that hopefully he could understand.

"Imagine if Hiccup died and all you have is that one crossbow."

This statement caused the former dragon's eyes to furrow. "Go on."

"Imagine if that crossbow is all you have left to remember him by, the only reminder that Hiccup was your friend. My axe was given to me by my uncle shortly before he died." I could feel a heavy sensation in my heart, the memory of my helplessness. I was only a little girl at the time. "And now that my axe is ruined, all I have left is the wreckage."

"How did your uncle die?" Toothless asked. His tone was cold, measured. He must have understood what I had been getting at.

"Died in a dragon attack. He stood his ground when everyone else ran for shelter."

"I'm sorry for your loss," Toothless stated. I couldn't help but imagine that he felt somewhat guilty, since he was after all, a dragon. "Your uncle sounded rather brave." It must have been something if even a _dragon _was acknowledging Fearless Finn Hofferson for what he was, brave.

I had to change the subject to before I did something I would regret. Anymore and I might start to forget what he really was. I reaffirmed my purpose with a question. "Just fine, so whose side are you on in anyways?"

"Excuse me?" To be fair to him, I did not fully explain the question.

"You're well, you know, but you aren't one of us." All he had to do was add in the term 'dragon' and 'Viking' in the right places. Instead of giving a reply, the dragon just looked up at the stars above. He stood there silently, looking at the sky.

Eventually, he broke the silence with a question. "Why do Vikings and

my Kin need to be enemies?"

"Well, your Kin," I appropriated his own terms. Honestly, why did dragons have their weird way of referring to their own kind? Was calling themselves dragons too much of a hassle? "Your Kin show up every few month or so to take all our food away."

"And you Vikings have slaughtered entire nests of my Kin for whatever reason." He had me there. Many Tribes were known laying siege to entire nests of dragons, so us Vikings aren't exactly guilt free in that regard.

"What are you getting at?" I asked. "Andâ€¦ start making sense, we keep answering each other's questions with more questions."

Toothless sighed. "As you said when we first met, I am a dragon because my heart is of a dragon's. So I am on the side of my Kin, butâ€¦ I do not want to be Hiccup's enemy."

"Why?" I said.

"I would like to be Hiccup's friend, even when I return to well, you know." I think my jaw dropped for a split second. The dragon wanted to remain friends with a human. That wasâ€¦ that was an unthinkable, impossible, ridiculous thing that could only exist in a children's book.

"Are you serious?"

"Very. I think I can convince the rest of my Kin to leave your nest more or less alone. Maybe set up an arrangement or pact of some sortâ€¦ Hiccup had some ideas of his own, too."

"Why am I not surprised?" I said mostly to myself. Toothless and Hiccup wanted to broker peace between Vikings and dragonkind through some sort of political arrangement. Aside from the fact that it was justâ€¦ weird, there probably plenty bad blood on both sides to make it difficult. I should really start expecting the insane from those two.

"Astrid!" I heard a voice say behind us. I turned and looked around and saw, Snotlout, his draconic arm bandaged.

"Snotlout!" I said. He seemed excited to see me, an awkward grin on his face.

"And Fruitlessâ€¦" he said to the former dragon.

"Toothlessâ€¦" he corrected. "Snotlout, why are you up?"

"I just wanted so fresh air after waking up so I thought I'd do some jogging." The boy did look like he was rather sweaty, so his story checked out. Also, he was not up yet when Toothless and I had left, so it was coincidence he showed up. Hopefully. "Thenâ€¦ I found you guysâ€¦ sitting out here on the beach. At Nightâ€¦ Just the two of youâ€¦ Just wanted to check on youâ€¦"

"Yes, just us," Toothless proudly declared. He obviously did not understand the subtext. My mouth was glued together in sudden shock

and disbelief. I had thought only Hiccup and that dragon made simply unthinkable thoughts, but apparently even _Snotlout _can have crazy ideas, too. That was wrong on so many levels.

"Oh, soâ€¦ are you and Astridâ€¦" Before he could finish that statement, I almost punched him in the face, but I stopped my fist from impacting when I only just remembered that he was exactly in the same position as Hiccup. The boy flinched back and guarded his face with his arms with a cry of, "No, not my beautiful face!" I drew my fist back. He was used to getting beat up without so much as blinking, so he was not scared of the injuries. I knew it had to do with the disfigurement that came along withâ€¦ being like Hiccup and Alvin.

"Snotlout, Toothless and I are notâ€¦" I said, trying hard to make it sound convincing. I really did not want to make the situation worse by making it sound like I was denying the truth. "Toothless and I are a not an itemâ€¦" The former dragon only looked at me with confusion, he clearly. That was not helping matters. It did not matter what he thought, I did not care about what he thought. What was more important was what Snotlout, and potentially everyone else he told, thought.

"You're not?" He asked shyly. "But what about the what aboutâ€¦ this night, alone on the beach, with each other?" Especially important since this was our first moment of actual freedom in a month.

"What's so special about a night on the beach with another?" asked Toothless, confused from me not explaining anything at all to him. Maybe dragons did not value this sort of thing like we humans did. I mean, they clearly have different ideas for how water should tasteâ€¦

"Whatâ€¦ are you doing here, then?"

"Just talking," Toothless said. "There's nothing wrong with talking with someone else on the beach at night is there?" Thor, he was really ignorant.

"I guess notâ€¦ when I saw you two, I was just thinkingâ€¦" I understood what he meant. He felt somewhat threatened by the prospect of a stranger, an outsider, making off with me.

I had to put an end to this before it got even more awkward. The last thing I wanted to do was have everyone around me think I had a thing for a dragon of all things. "Snotlout, Toothless and I do not have a romantic relationship, at all. We were just talking about
"

Toothless, it seemed finally understood what Snotlout and I had been talking about. "Wait, you thought I was...on a date _with her?"_Snotlout blushed slightly. "Well, we're not. She'sâ€¦ not exactly my type." Translation, not a dragon. Which was fine, he wasn't my type either. "Honestly, I don't see what Hiccup sees in her, but he can have her for all I care." Somehow, that actually stung a little. I guess it was because it was my first official rejection from anyone. Even if it was a dragon in human form.

"Wait, you'reâ€¦ dumping _Astrid_" Snotlout exclaimed in disbelief.

"But why?"

"Just leave it alone, Snotlout." I said. The situation could get even worse if it dragged on any further. "We are not on an item. Snotlout, if I kept a list of the people I would date, he would not be on it." I didn't carry such a list, of course. I was not that petty. Admittedly, I don't think I would put Snotlout on it, attempted heroism notwithstanding. Granted, my dad does keep a list for people I am allowed to marry and I was very sure Snotlout was on it somewhere. And so long as no one knew Toothless's origins, chances are he would be on there too once my dad learns of him. There is an awful disconnect between Viking fathers and their daughters.

"I'll think I'll take that as a compliment," said Toothless since his feelings were mostly mutual.

* * *

><p>I wondered for a moment if some higher power had declared open season on Hiccup's feet. Astrid had been prone to crushing his toes just before everything went crazy; I shot him in the foot while Alvin held us captive; and the Outcast Chief himself had severed both of my friends by the knees. And he was still healing from all of that damage.

With Snotlout away and Chief Stoick writing plans for his son, I was left to my own devices. I had a pen and my notebook so that I could write my findings. I had tied a cloth to one of Hiccup's thighs to measure the effects of the potion. See, when Chief Stoick had originally seen his son as battered as was, he had ordered some of his men that knew how to treat amputations to cauterize the stumps to stop the bleeding. Except, I had to inform them that the bleeding had already stopped on their own, making their job redundant. And now, according to my measurements, the stumps of Hiccup's legs had grown by almost three inches since we had recovered him. That was roughly an inch every two hours. And that wasn't even getting into the matter of his new tail.

I was going to have to tell Gobber _not_ to make replacement legs, but rather special pants.

It was incredible to say the least, just as everything else I knew about that potion was. The power to recover from _any_ injury, even dismemberment, is nothing short of incredible. Turning into a dragon was also incredible, as was increasing one's strength from just a drink. And when you thought about it, none of that made a lick of sense.

Fact: The potion causes muscles to become stronger and develop increased motor functions even before any transformation occurs. Hiccup easily carried an axe was originally too heavy for him to carry.

Fact: Those who drink the potion possess drastically increased healing ability, but as a consequence gradually become more dragon-like in the areas that are recovering.

Both of these traits on their own probably would be incredibly good, but together, the potion does come off as rather inefficient.

If the goal was to make someone stronger and heal from any injury, then making someone gradually turn into a dragon means that eventually, they will lose their ability to fight as they become too inhuman to use their bodies properly. Toothless spent at least a week before he could learn to walk properly without tripping over himself and even then he still tries to move on all fours when he can.

If the point was to make someone into a dragon, then why have someone retain human form at? Wouldn't it just be easier to have someone immediately change into a dragon, instead of a slow process that happens every time an injury happened? The healing ability is probably necessary though as the transformation process warps the body.

Theory: The potion is either faulty or incomplete. In its current state, its effects, except for the rapid healing, tend not to support each other very well.

If I could read the rest of the text in Hiccup's book, I would have the confirmation I needed. Unfortunately, I could only read Norse as my friend did. Maybe if we could find a translator, I could be able to find a way to read the Latin and whatever that other language is called.

There were also other considerations of the potion, such as how it interacted with the specially-made silver arrow Hiccup had made.

Fact: Alvin had drank the potion two and had turned into some sort unknown dragon breed.

Fact: The arrows turned a dragon, Toothless, into a human being while causing almost no harm to the former dragon.

Fact: When Hiccup plunged the arrow into him, Alvin flesh was practically burned off and started to undergo some sort of decay. This caused him enough pain and suffering to consider withdrawing, seemingly off the whole island entirely.

Theory: The arrows clearly do different things based on their targets. An actual dragon, like Toothless, would be transformed, but dragons made through the potion, like Alvin, would suffer grievous injuries. The only way I would know for sure is if I could test it out on Hiccup and other potion warped targets. But given that the result is supernaturally grievous injuries, I do not think I would have any volunteers.

I also needed to figure out by what method it determined what people turned into. Alvin and Hiccup had turned into two completely different dragons. My only problem is that I had no information to make even a basic hypothesis. And I don't think Stoick would be too accepting of any more people deciding to become inhuman monsters.

Currently, I had my friend's book, having taken it from my friend's body before anyone else could find it. There was no telling what the Chief would do to the source of all of our troubles in the past month. If it got destroyed, Hiccup's chances of finding a cure would eventually drop to nonexistent variables. At the same time, I did not want to open it myself. I was afraid if something bad happening to me

if I opened to it. Maybe I would get struck by lightning or be set on fire or turn into a frog. Fact was, I did not want to risk it. At least, not without Hiccup being the one to open it.

Additionally, I had other things to worry about aside from the book. Alvin had become some previously unknown dragon of some sort. And I had to classify it. Someone had to do it and I was the only one really qualified for the job. I may have sat the battle out, but I was able to see what had happened with Alvin via the use of a spyglass. Plus, I had more than enough details for Alvin's feats and approximate abilities from listening to Hooligan and Bog Burglar warriors who seen the six on one battle, even after accounting for exaggeration.

For starters, Alvin's appearance was freaky. The transparent scales and flesh, allowed us to see the blood as it flowed through his body with each beat of his two hearts. Whatever Alvin was, this visage was clearly meant to intimidate potential enemies. Very few creatures, even Vikings, like to see internal organs. A creature that makes its organs visible at all times is very unsettling. On a cheerier note, we now have actual proof that blood does flow through the body in a continuous loop.

Alvin also possessed powerful claws and freakish strength. Practically as long as shortwords, those claws were strong enough to tear hardened steel, as was evidenced by the fact that everyone who fought Alvin in a melee lost their weapons. According to several Vikings, the claws were also sharp enough to tear faces off and viciously mutilate. Hiccup was lucky Alvin on went for his legs. The reason Alvin was so near unbeatable was just as much due to the dragon he was becoming was a type of creature practically optimized for lethality as much as he had powerful regenerative abilities.

As neither he nor Hiccup were not fully transformed yet, I did not know if Alvin would ever get fire breathing abilities, so I could not estimate a shot limit or get an idea of how powerful the fire was. However, if I would learn of those things, I had no doubt it would be frightening.

Currently, I pegged Alvin's statistics as the following on my notebook:

Offense: Retractable sword-like claws capable of tearing steel. At least 15.

Defense: See above. Claws can catch the blade of an axe mid-swing as Astrid unfortunately learned. At least 15.

Speed: Fast. At least 10.

Fear Rating: We can see the blood moving through Alvin's body. That is as fearsome as it was disgusting. Definitely 20.

I would have to make adjustments when I had more information, but I felt that these rough estimates would be good for now.

As for what to call this recently discovered species, whatever Alvin was, he was definitely an unstoppable killing machine. As he was the only known member of this dragon breed, I would have to assume that

any traits he developed are the standard for all dragons of his type. Assuming there were more of course. It was clear he was a Sharp Class dragon, since the claws seemed to be the only weapons Alvin needed. And given how he was described as effortlessly slaughtering warriors, I have decided to dub Alvin a Vicious Exterminator.

* * *

><p>I have decided I like boats, especially as a passenger and not the cargo. Hiccup had been right to compare sailing to flying, though I add that it is more like riding on a parent's back before learning to actually fly oneself. I was still seasick, but now that I actually knew how to use my legs, I was better at suppressing it. With the bright light of dawn and fresh sea winds in my face, I couldn't help but feel, for once in a long time, free. I was no longer a captive stuffed in a tunnel making weapons by some overgrown brute.<p>

If only Hiccup could enjoy it as well. I was beside my friend, still in a coma. Snotlout sat on the other side of the ship from me (Was it port or starboard, again?), looking rather glum. The only other person I knew aboard was Hiccup's father, everyone else was on a different ship that followed right beside or behind us. My other allies were elsewhere at this time. Astrid, Fishlegs, and the twins were on the boat right next to our own and Camicazi had gone off on her own direction since her Tribe lived elsewhere from the others. She did promise she would come if Hiccup was making another "crazy adventure" however.

Additionally, several of the other ships had a number of former captives. I did not see the point in bringing them along, but Hiccup's father apparently had a plan for them. Maybe he was going to bind them into his service or something. I did not care much for them. Hiccup used them for his own ends. As far as I was concerned, we had no obligation to aid them further unless they had something to offer.

I had never thought about it before now, since I had used to see the Herd afar, but with the way the ships were aligned together, moving side by side, it reminded me of how my Kin moved together in a Flight. I suppose Hiccup had been right to compare sailing to flying.

The majority of our voyage was in dull silence and utter boredom. The unfortunate thing about being a passenger was that there were fewer activities to distract me. I also only had the faintest idea of where we were going and no idea how long it would take. If it was the night time, I could have used the Moon and the stars to get an idea of where I was relative to the Nest. Every Squire had to at least know how to navigate using the night sky before even being considered for the task and I was considered a prodigy for having learned about it so quickly. Which was true, I was a Night Fury, we were good at nearly everything. I wonder if the Herd practiced something similar, after all, we already shared several ideas already, such as honor, glory, and "spin the icicle".

Which only left me one choice for distraction. I needed to see my charge. "Soâ€| are you okay?" I asked Snotlout.

"Uh yeah," said the boy. "Just fine." He still had his arm bandaged, despite the fact that practically everyone likely knew about it

already. So I got the idea he wanted things to be "just fine".

"So you're not feeling down after, well, your arm?" Or Astrid. I got the feel that like Hiccup, this boy wanted to pursue that female.

"As if," he said more confidently. Maybe he was bored as I was, after all? "With my new arm, I'm going to kill the dragon who maimed my old one." He spoke of the Whispering Death, the dragon that had been in my nightmares ever since I was young and the one that had nearly killed Snotlout. It was also the only dragon I knew, other than myself that could understand Norse.

I had a little score to settle and some questions to ask that dragon. "Well, you can count me in on that," I said. "I hate that monster. So you're not feeling upset at all?"

"Nope."

"Really?" I asked in disbelief. Then again, the only ones who I knew who were not too thrilled about slowly becoming one of the Kin were Hiccup and Astrid. Maybe it would be easier to convince him to fully convert to a dragon instead?

"Not at all." That is, assuming that Snotlout is being wholly honest with me and himself. There was only one way to make sure.

I whispered a question in his ear. It was best if few people as possible knew it. "If you're really sureâ€¦ I guess you wouldn't be afraid if you became all dragon, now won't you?" At this statement, Snotlout turned somewhat pale.

His lips quivered slightly and his tone transformed into that of fear. "What? Of- of course, I would not. I'm not afraid ofâ€¦ I just don't want to be all dragon." Well, that proved it. Given how he reacted to Astrid nearly punching him last night, I was pretty sure he was just as afraid of changing, if not more, than Hiccup.

"Well, I'm sure Hiccup will figure something out eventually," I said.

"Yeah," Snotlout said, trying to put a little more cheer into his voice. "And until then, all I have to do is just not get hit again... everâ€¦" I wondered for a moment if he knew that I was the one who decided to change him. He probably didn't, as he was being rather, amiable to me.

We decided to end the conversation there as neither of us seemed to have anything to talk about.

It turned out that the voyage to Hiccup's home was much longer than I anticipated. Sunset was almost arriving by the time we docked in the hareboar of Berk. The first to leave their ships were the wounded. Several men went to pick up and carry the wounded or incapacitated, including Hiccup into their respective homes or places where they could be cared for.

After them, Snotlout and I disembarked at the same time. I was tired and feeling some way lazy. Despite having spent all day not moving more than a foot, all I really wanted to do was head to sleep now. I

wondered if I could find a nice cold rock for me to lay on. That would have been great.

At this point a man approached us. Tall and large like most men, but I could see that his hair was somewhat greyer than normal. Snotlout seemed to know who he was immediately. "Hey, dad."

The man narrowed his eyes towards Snotlout, who had tried to keep his eyes steady on the man's face. The boy looked really nervous when his father said, "Show it to me."

Snotlout complied and undid the bandaged that obscured his arm. "Boy, what am I going to do with you?"

"I'm fine dad, really." I saw Snotlout try to say.

"That's for me and the Tribal Council to decide in the morning." At this I saw Snotlout turn somewhat pale.

"Is there something wrong?" I piped up. I had to intervene. Snotlout was my charge and my responsibility. I chose to involve myself when I saved him and I was simply continuing my chosen task.

"My boy'sâ€¦ a monster," Snotlout's said the words with such venom I could almost feel my insides were melting. "All because Hiccup had wanted to make himself stronger. I always knew that boy was nothing but trouble." At this point, the knowledge that Hiccup had transformed himself into a partial dragon was openly accepted. Apparently, someone overheard him say it to the Chief. After that, it wasn't hard for people to make an assumption that Hiccup had been the cause of the other two. Which was true.

"Yeah," said Snotlout, some anger and resentment in his voice, but mostly, it was just fear for correcting his father. "Everyone knows he madeâ€¦ whatever it is that makes people into freaksâ€¦"

While I was sworn to assist Snotlout, I did not want them to slander Hiccup like that. Without thinking, I stated, "Hey! It's my fault that your son became what he is now, Hiccup's. Just leave him alone."

At this, I could feel his eyes seething and burning with anger and contempt for me. Snotlout just looked shocked and surprised, less anger and more confusion. He probably didn't even know I was the cause of it. I had hoped to hide that fact for as long as I could, but my sense of protectiveness got the better of me. "You did what?" he said. "You made my son intoâ€¦ this?" He pointed at his son.

"Yes," I said. It was too late now. "I had no choice to save him or else he would have died."

"So not only you have turned my son into a monster, you denied him a chance to go to Valhalla or FÃ³lkvangr with a hero's death?" said the man as he drew a sword, pointing it right at me. Snotlout, looking very pale and afraid, backed away from the two of us.

The man's statement confused me. Snotlout's father was angry at me for saving his son's life? That made no sense and defied all logic. And what were these Valhalla and FÃ³lkvangr places anyways? Maybe

Vikings were probably not as smart or wise as I had been led to believe. "Honor demanded that I save his life!" I shouted.

"And honor demands I end yours!"

Unfortunately for me, I was completely terrible at using a sword or any other melee weapon, so I never bothered to carry one on my person. I had my crossbow, but I would not be able to arm and shoot it in the time it took for the man to overrun me. This meant, I had neither the skill or a weapon to fight back with. Not only that, Snotlout's father was likely bigger and more experienced than me in combat. I had no chance of beating him even if I had a weapon and the skill to fight. I tried to run, but my legs got tangled in a fishing net, sending me toppling to the ground.

Snotlout's father closed in on me, sword held high. He swung it over my head and it did not hint. I heard a clang of metal meeting metal. I opened my eyes and saw Stoick the Vast right on top of me. "What are you doing, Spitelout?" he said to the man, now identified as Spitelout.

"Avenging my family's honor. This one has cursed my son into the same fate as your failure!"

"He has a point," I said quietly. If it was not for me misjudging the situation with that Whispering Death, Snotlout would not be in this mess. And on top of that, I was the one who gave him the potion.

Stoick apparently was better at suppressing his anger towards people who were disrespecting Hiccup than I was. "Whatever happens to our children will be decided in the Council tomorrow. And Toothless is under my protection as my guest is that clear?"

Spitelout sheathed his sword and turned towards his son and then to me. "Then, I demand restitution."

"I have nothing I could offer," I said. The concept of debts is also known to my Kin, so I knew what he was talking about. Unfortunately, I owned next to nothing that could be of value.

"You do, give that to me," the man said as he pointed to the object strapped to my back. Suddenly, I started to understand Astrid's words about special possessions a bit more personally. While Hiccup was still alive, that crossbow was what I had made my first kills with. I also helped make it by cutting the wood that formed the stock and forging several critical internal components. But if it would settle my debt to him, then I had no choice but to give it.

I offered it to the man before Stoick could protest. He took my crossbow and snapped it in half using his big meaty hands. I suddenly felt regretting my decision. "We're even." And then he and his son had left. Hopefully, I could still aid Snotlout.

"You didn't have to do that you know." Stoick said.

"I did, it was my fault anyways."

The Chief just gave a sigh. "Come on, I think we should get you over to bed before you do anything even crazier."

I nodded and followed him through the nest I suppose it was. My knowledge of Herd terms was still incomplete. So, I had to substitute using the closest analogues in my Kin's vocabulary. The place seemed eerily familiar to me, as I walked past each wooden cave home. It was as if I had been here before, but I could not understand why.

On my way over to Hiccup's home were a couple of those wood and stone spires the Herd used for defense. Catapults and trebuchets, Hiccup had explained to me how they worked when we were trying to think of uses for that Zippleback gas. Before, I had thought it was impressive that the Herd could make such unusual defenses, now that I knew how they operated, I could not help but look at them with a small gleam of awe. These weapons were designed to throw objects with great mass with relative ease. I had destroyed many of them in the short time I have Hunted without giving them much thought other than counting how many I had broken. Now I knew better.

Before I could take in the scene more, Stoick stopped in front of one of the wooden cave homes and opened the door. "Welcome to my house, Toothless." House must have been what these places were called. "While you here, you will be my guest."

"I thank you for your hospitality." We stepped inside. The inside of Hiccup's 'house' looked odd. As one of the Kin, I was used to seeing sparse nests with very few physical possessions. My Kin were often mobile, changing homes every season or so, without a second thought. Most anyone carried along with them was a favorite bone or a set of trophies. The inside of human home was practically littered with possessions, most of which I did not know the function of.

There was a fire going inside the house, contained in a stone thing, that was connected the wall. Since he had been carried over by a man who was missing an arm and a leg, Hiccup had made it here before us and was still quietly dozing in this very large wooden object that had all these cloths and furs on top of it. My friend was inside them all, practically cocooned. Stoick seemed to smile a little at the sight of his son. "He's finally home, safe at last."

This was a father that cared. Hiccup was lucky to have a father like him. Mine had disappeared into parts unknown just before my egg had even been laid. I quietly nodded.

"Few people are willing to claim him as friend," he told me. "And you've helped me bring him back to me, I promise, I'll find a way to send you home too."

I almost flinched at that. I was not ready to go home. Not only were Snotlout and Hiccup still well neither human nor dragon, but I was not ready to turn back yet. In fact, I did not know if using the potion to return myself to normal would have been a valid option. One wrong move and I might kill myself in some arcane accident or something. "I can't go home not yet." I said.

"You can't?" the chief seemed apologetic. "Why not?"

"Well, I can't go home, until I can cure Hiccup and Snotlout. I swore an oath, sir." I didn't tell him, of course, it was because I was one of the Kin. That would have things more complicated than I wanted them to be.

"Ohâ€|" At this my host smiled at me. "I know how that is then. My son was right to have you for a friend."

"Thank you," I said in reply. I didn't think he would have the same response if he knew the truth about me, but it was a compliment nonetheless.

"Still, maybe I can set up some mail so you can write to your parentsâ€|"

"My mother and I are not on speaking termsâ€| I do not wish to write to her." And I was illiterate, making it hard for me to write without assistance. And I was very sure all of my Kin, including mother, could not read as well. Besides, I did not want for any of my Kin to know what has become of me unless they could fix Hiccup, Snotlout, and me. Now, if I could write to my Kingâ€| that was a different story all together. Of course, if any Kin could read, it would be him.

Hiccup's father just sighed, I had made it difficult for him to show gratitude to me after all. "Come on, you'll have to use Hiccup's bed for tonight as he is in mine." I followed him over to another wooden thing, similar to the one Hiccup slept in, but significantly smaller.

"Where will you sleep?" I asked him. It was rude not to ask.

"Don't worry about it, I'm used to sleeping in chairs on occasion," he told me. A chair did not sound like something very comfortable, but I nodded. Hiccup's father then moved toward a wooden box of some sort near the bed. He opened in and pulled out a set of clothing, a green tunic and some pants similar to the get up I had seen Hiccup with when we had first met. "You also need to get changed." He placed them on top of the cloth sheets.

"What's wrong with what I currently wear?" I asked him.

"The fact that Alvin gave those to youâ€| and they're mostly old and torn." Now that I had thought about, I had been wearing these clothes for about a week. I wonder if humans liked wearing clothes for that long. I just nodded in compliance. I was his guest. "Good." was his only reply. And then I was alone.

I removed myself from the rags Alvin had given me and put on what was essentially belonged to Hiccup. It fit, though it was somewhat tight around the abdomen. Hiccup was still scrawnier than me. Not only had I been taught many things by the boy, but now I also wore his own clothes and slept in his bed. No matter what, I kept getting things from him, one way or another, yet I still have not done nearly enough to pay him back for it.

I pulled open the sheet of cloth and slipped inside. It was mostly made of wood, so it wasn't much different from sleeping on a hard stone floor. It was however, more comfortable due to the blanket providing some insulation from the air around me. I had been used to essentially just sleeping in old rags when I stayed in Alvin's 'care'. If I was still a Night Fury, I should have been starting to wake up around this time. Instead, I find myself weary and longing for rest.

I don't know, how long I had been asleep and I do not remember what my dreams were. I assume it was rather simple as I did not wake from a nightmare. But I awoke when I heard the loud sound of something. I couldn't tell what it was. I leapt out of the bed to see what it was.

There, I saw Hiccup, finally awake and moving. He was on the floor, mostly wearing only a pair of trousers. "Toothless, you're in my house," he said to me, his expression was of disbelief. I leap for joy and began moving and running through the house like a lunatic. My friend was awake and all was well in the world. He just stared at me as I knocked over objects throughout his home. Hiccup had said somethings, but I could not understand him through my excitement. Giving myself a moment to settle down, I moved towards him excitedly.

"I've missed you, bud." I appropriated his own term for me. The color on his face flushed a little as he smiled. "You're finally awake!"

"I missed you, too. Does my dad know you're here?" I nodded. I turned and looked, yet I could not find a trace of his father anywhere. Hiccup looked down at his legs, prompting me to follow his actions. They had completely grown back, as Fishlegs had predicted. Though, they were clearly no longer human. The feet more resembled hindpaws and the legs and thighs seemed far too bulky and rounded to belong on a human body, especially on a twig figure like Hiccup's.

He then reached behind him and drew something. It was a tail. One very similar, though much smaller than the one I had myself. There was little doubt about it now, Hiccup was becoming a Night Fury. As far as I was concerned, he deserved being one of the most powerful of Kin. "Well, I guess one of us is happy about this." Such a pity he does not feel the same way. That was when Hiccup dropped and turned his attention towards one of the walls, inexplicably? "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" I said, in confusion.

"That soundâ€¦ I could feel, somethingâ€¦"

"Something?" I asked concerned. I might have had an idea of what it was, but it was too unreasonable to know.

"Help me up!" said Hiccup.

I helped him to his feet. Each of Hiccup's steps felt rather heavy and rather looked rather awkward. His legs might have been weak from havingâ€¦ well regrowing. And the tail, which was useless to Hiccup even though he could move it like an appendage. On one of my Kin, it might have provided balance and control during flying and swimming. It was simply too out of place on a mostly humanoid body to provide any real benefit. "I guess I am returning the favorâ€¦" I said. This all reminded me of the situation I was in when Hiccup showed me how to walk properly, only with everything reversed.

I carried Hiccup on my shoulders, providing the support he needed as he limped out of his own home. Each movement he took required lots of heavy breaths and delicate pacing. We stepped out of the house's

threshold and into a moonless night.

In the darkness, I now suddenly remembered this place. I checked the night sky as I helped Hiccup hobble into the right position, hoping that I was wrong. The moon was gone. Swallowed completely by its black half. I helped Hiccup hobble in the a single direction. I had been in Hiccup's home settlement before, not as a guest, but as a Hunter. This place had been my second Hunt, chosen specifically for the fact that its proximity was so close to the Nest. There was another island nearby, where I had my first.

"I can't believe you cannot hear it. Whatever it isâ€¦ it rattles me to the core," said my friend. "Do you have any idea what it is?"

"That would be the King." It is strange being so close to home, yet unable to reach it.

* * *

><p>Some mythology here, Valkyries aren't warriors, rather they are the caretakers of the dead warriors in Valhalla. That's what Snotlout was referencing.

Also, Stoick's action to NOT outright disowning his son is because of vastly different circumstances than in any of the canons. Hiccup did not fail a test or betray him as he did in the movie and because of nearly everything the boy did last chapter. Also, he does not know of Toothless being a dragon yetâ€¦

With the reveal of the Flightmare, a lot of Astrid's character can actually be traced towards that night. Granted, I don't think at this time that it's important, but I feel it's important to bring up and show that it does influence her.

And now, the whole story is completely off the rails.

9. Chapter 9

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Had to actually scrap a few plot ideas I had originally. Mostly things for the end gameâ€¦ but stuff that hasn't come into play at all yet, so there's no worries about it. You will however be surprised to see the plot ideas that will unfold in the next few chapters.

**Unfortunately, I may or may not be updating during the month of December, due to some unforeseen circumstances. Depending on my situation, I will be unable to access the internet or a decent laptop. **

* * *

><p>With each step I took, I could feel my feet ache. It was as though they spent weeks, maybe months, disused and atrophied. Which was not true, I had been walking just fine yesterday, well, the day before yesterday. I could faintly see the very earliest hint that

dawn's light was coming. I suppose it made sense, since they were not the same legs I was born with. I remember Alvin severing my legs quite clearly, so I must have completely regrown them in the time I had been out, which I have no idea how long it has been. Since the rest of my body did not have the same ache as my legs, at most, I have been out for a few days, maybe less.<p>

I had the same problem with my tail, which tended to drag along limply on the ground. The strange thing was I suddenly knew how to control strange appendage I never had before. It was like I suddenly understood, just like that, which parts of my mind made the limb move in a specific fashion. Maybe it was something very similar to how Toothless learned Norse just by being human. Granted, its muscles were too weak for me to actually do anything at all with it yet, so it is just dragged along the ground. I felt that, given enough time, I would have little trouble in using my tail forâ€| whatever it is dragons do with theirs.

What made this situation even better was the fact that I was only dressed up in one of my dad's trousers. My lower body had warped to the point that I was no longer able to wear any of my old clothing. This included my undergarments, meaning that the only thing stopping me from embarrassing myself in public (other than the obvious), were my father's trousers and even then it would keep falling if I did not put in the effort. I was glad that the weather wasn't so chilly this morning. Hopefully, my dad would get me something I could actually wear before I got exiled.

I sighed. I shouldn't worry about that. I should instead enjoy what little time I had left.

I was part dragon now and given that I've been out for a while, I was surely going to be exiled. Unless my father decided to run a conspiracy to keep my condition a secret, I was fairly sure that everyone knew of it by now. People do not just run after having their buttocks chopped by an axe after allâ€| or regrow legs. Or grow scales. My father was stubborn, not crazy. Though, the fact Toothless was still here meant that either my dad is more accepting of dragons than I thought or Astrid was. I could not decide which of those possibilities seemed more impossible.

As Toothless carried me closer to the Cliffside, I began wondering what kind of dragon the King must have been to make a roar so loud that it rattled my bones, yet could only be heard by dragons. I had never heard it before now. It must have been a kind of sorcery. While Toothless and I had not really discussed about it much, but I knew that some dragons did possess their own strange powers. Though, he said that few really demonstrate or advertise such powers, the most common practitioners were apparently Terrible Terrors who used tended to act as healers or as diviners, much like how Gothi did for Berk. "Soâ€| what kind of dragon is the King?" I asked.

"Wellâ€| he is the King. As far as I could tell, he's always been that to us," said Toothless. "I don't really what my Lord is, since I have neither been told if there are others of his kind or if he is unique." My friend sat us down on the green grass, just far enough away from the cliff not to worry about falling. I was turned, facing the direction of the King's loud, yet not so loud roars.

"So does he have a name?"

"Well, noâ€¦" was Toothless's sheepish reply. "I do not know my Lord's name."

"Wait, you mean to tell me, that despite how much importance dragons place upon names, so much so that you have to earn the right to have one, you do not know the name of the one who gives out those names?"

"I don't make the rules. Besides, I don't know the name of every Kin I meet, just the ones that are important to me."

"Except for your apparent leader's. Doesn't that strike you the least bit odd?" Maybe there was a good reason, but not knowing the name of your own leader and instead referring to him by titles just sounded very strange. Maybe there was sorcery involvedâ€¦

"Now, that you mention itâ€¦ it is odd. I should remember to ask him laterâ€¦"

"Rightâ€¦"so if he's unique for a dragon, can you explain what he looks like."

"Certainly," said Toothless. Then he began describing his King. I was amazed to say the least to hear about a six eyed dragon whose head was large enough to eat a boat. Toothless did not give me any description on the rest of his body, but the size of the head alone indicated a truly massive dragon. I don't think Bork would have been so bold meeting the King.

"I'm pretty sure Fenrir is still bigger," was my only statement.

Toothless laughed a bit. "I have no idea who that is, but that just sounds preposterous. I do not think anything is bigger than my King."

"I don't know, it's pretty hard to beat a wolf with a mouth that's tall enough to reach the ground _and the sky._"

"Okay, that is big..."

"Well, if it's anything, I think all of us humans are pretty much helpless against something about his sizeâ€¦ In fact, I'm pretty sure he could level the whole Archipelago if he felt like it." Which brought up a question, why hadn't he done it before now? Was there a reason?

"Oh don't worry, the King won't unless you give him a good reason to burn everything to the group."

"He won't?" I asked.

"Of course not," said Toothless. "All things must be done in accordance to Law. He cannot do anything to you unless you allow him or give him a good reason to do so. Especially if you are a guest in his domain. Well, assuming you can talk to himâ€¦ the Law does not apply to animals."

"Well, it's a good thing the laws of hospitality are so universal

then. So all I have to do is get myself invited and we can start negotiating a peace treatyâ€¦| think he accepts letters?"

Toothless frowned at that, mostly because he still did not understand how letters, or well, reading in general really worked. "Assuming he knows Norse. As far as I know, no other Kin has learned of the written language of your people."

"If only it could be so easy." I also wondered if the King might know a thing or two about human magic. I mean, I know it was really unlikely, but really, I could still hope, right? Besides, when I get involved, it seems the less likely something is to occur for a normal person, the more likely it seemed to happen to me. I mean, not only do I not inherit the fighting prowess that essentially ran in both sides of my family tree, I end up born in a leap year and left handed. And then the first time I try my hand at sorcery, I turn myself into a dragon, very, very slowly.

Both of us started at the horizon, Helheim's Gate was off in the distance somewhere. It did not really take me hard to figure out that the King must have been staging the raids from there; afterall, the dragons came from that direction at all times.

And then I had a strange thought enter into my head. What if I lived in the dragon's nest? I wasn't exactly the most popular person around on Berk even on the best of days and it was almost certain I'd be banished. I was a freak as I was now and I had no idea on how I would change back. Maybe it would be easier if I just let go of my humanity entirely, live life as a dragon. It surely can't have been worse than my life beforeâ€¦| this mess. Dad would be better off without meâ€¦| I shoved those thoughts from my head, or more accurately, Toothless provided something more interesting and less depressing to think about.

Dawn was fast approaching. I heard the very faint crowing of a rooster from the town somewhere. Toothless, having heard it, decided to comment, "You know, back when I was a hatchling, I had this weird habit of trying to crow like a rooster whenever I got excited about anything."

I blinked, having that statement catch me completely off my guard. "Wait, what?" That just seemed so random.

"You heard me," Toothless said with a serious expression on his face. "I used to spout 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!' every time I got excited. I grew out of it after a whileâ€¦|"

"Soâ€¦| why are you telling me this now?"

"Because you need to laugh a little, since you have that expression on your face when you're downâ€¦| So go ahead, just think about what I said."

I did, mostly because once the idea entered my head, I could not stop. I imagined Toothless as he was when we met and then decided to shrink that image until it was just the size of a Terrible Terror. And in my imagination, I tried to imagine that little dragon trying to imitate a rooster. I just laughed a little upon the completion of that mental image. "Okay, that is pretty funny, I'll admit."

"Good, just, don't tell Astrid! Please!" Like many childhood habits I might have had, Toothless must have been slightly embarrassed to state it, even though he was my friend.

"Oh, no, I think Astrid definitely needs to hear about this!" I teased. "Toothless, the Night Fury. Crows like a rooster when excited. I think even Astrid would-"

At that point, Toothless just tackled me to the ground, easy since both of us were sitting right next to each other. We both laughed as we toppled downwards. I wasn't hurting or anything, so I wasn't suddenly afraid of growing even more scale. And besides, even if it did, having the chance to relax was probably worth maybe a few more patches on my chest. It eventually devolved into a game of us just trying to bring the other to the soft grass while we sat. I lost, mostly since I had to keep my father's pants from falling every time I moved and because my legs were too weak for me to stand on my own.

Before long, dawn finally came while we were still in a heap. We stopped our roughhousing to enjoy the sunrise. It was our first since Alvin had taken us and it was good to share the experience with a friend. We both gave each other grins, feeling free.

Unfortunately, that good experience had to get cut short. No less than a minute since the sun finally poked itself from the horizon, Gobber, my tutor approached us. "Ah, well, I see you're awake. Was just about to fetch ya'."

"Gobber!" I said.

"Well, aren't you're a sight for sore eyes," The unfortunate implication of the saying caused us both to cringe. "Well! eye." He had something in his hands, some cloth of some sort.

"Toothless, this is Gobber, he taught me everything I know about blacksmithing!" Toothless and I both stood up to meet him. I was clutching at my father's pants. I was glad to see my teacher. "Gobber, this is Toothless, he's a friend of mine. He helped me escape from Alvin!"

"Aye, I heard! You know, most Vikings don't go into a melee with a crossbow." Gobber handed me the contents of his hands. Examining it briefly show me that it was a set of clothes a green tunic and some trousers, both similar to what I usually wore, though bigger. It also lacked the fur vest, but that was easy enough to replace.

"Astrid says I'm worse at sword fighting than Hiccup." Gobber raised his eyebrows, as though an indisputable fact of reality had been utterly violated. I think it was safe to say that I've contested a dozen 'indisputable facts' this month already. What was one more?

"Well, that's because you never bothered to use a sword before!"

Toothless gave a brief chuckle. "Yeah, that's true isn't it?"

"Well, it's a good thing you're awake, your father is going to bring Snotlout before the Tribal Council in a few hours to decide his

fateâ€¦ We weren't expecting you to be awake so soon, but it'd be best if you came along, too." Snotlout was going to appear before the Tribal Council? Did he commit a war crime or something? I knew why I was going, since it was likely that my dad informed the others, but why was my cousin going ahead?

"What happened to Snotlout?" I quipped.

"Same thing that happened to youâ€¦" Toothless said sheepishly. "I had to do it to save him, Hiccup." That could have been bad. Snotlout was considered one of the best Vikings of my generation. If he had beenâ€¦ well changed like I was, there was no telling what could happen to him. "Guessing he's a Monstrous Nightmare based the scale coloration."

"Great, next thing you know I'll turn Fishlegs into a Nadder and Astrid into a Gronckle." At the rate I was going, I was probably going to end up changing more people if I did not find a proper cure. My only hope had inexplicably turned out to be a weapon that melted Alvin's flesh.

"Nah, don't be silly, it'd be the other way around," Toothless stated.

I just glowered at him. I wasn't in the mood to contest that. My friend just grinned in response.

"Well, since you're awake, I think it might be best if I take you to your father now." I nodded, agreeing with Gobber perfectly.

"Great, I'll get changed." I said as I was carried back to my house. I silently cursed my weak legs. I could see the other homes stirring, people waking up and doing their chores. A couple of them taken notice of me and responded with looks of disbelief. Most probably did not have a chance to see me yet. It was going to be a long walk to the Great Hall, today. "Dad's probably going to exile meâ€¦" I muttered.

"No, he won't," Gobber stated as I discarded my father's trousers and slipped on my new clothes. I never thought going up one size in trousers was going to be something I would dread.

"No, especially not with me by your side," Toothless said.

"Eh, unfortunately, you won't," said Gobber. "Tribesmen allowed only, you're just an outsider, respect of the Chief and his son notwithstanding. Plus, you need to be adult..." Which was a shame, I could have used Toothless by side. If nothing else, he would have been a shoulder for me to lean on when things inevitably turned bad.

Toothless and I both exchanged grim expressions. "Sorry, bud. I guess I won't be by your side."

"It's fine," I said, even though I felt that it was not fine. "I'll make do without you."

"And that reminds me." Gobber reached on his belt and tossed Tothless a sack. The sound of metal clung a little as he jiggled the bag to inspect it.

"What's this?" my friend said as he opened it. Inside was a collection of several coins, mostly silvers and coppers.

"Stoick thinks that you should make yourself comfortable while you stay in his house hold, so he sent me to give you some coin to help get you settled. Maybe you can get yourself a nice set of clothing."

"This helps me buy clothes?" Toothless asked him. It occurred to me that dragons probably did not know about how money worked. I mean, I understood they knew about honor, glory and, loyalty, but did they know anything about economics?

"Well, yes," I explained. "You just exchange a preset value to get goods and services, such as clothing or food."

"Oh, is that it?" Toothless replied. "A simple barter." It was as if that simple explanation told him everything he needed to know.

"Well, yeahâ€¦"

"Then, I think I'll be fine then. Thank you, Sir," my friend said as he bowed towards my teacher. That wasâ€¦ surprisingly easier than I thought it was. Okay, so dragons also understood how to make trades and economy. Granted, they probably did not use money for that, which likely made trading more complicated. And that was before considering that dragons were completely illiterate and lacked an understanding of mathematics. Fishlegs and I would likely ask Toothless what dragons would trade each other once we had the time. "Would Chief Stoick allow me to go exploring on own?" he said.

Gobber nodded. "Of course, you are our guest here."

"Say, where is my father right now, anyways? I couldn't find him at home."

"Sacrificing," said Gobber. "Your father's set three yaks to the flame last night and has stayed up through morning." I cringed, sacrifices were a big deal and happened on occasion. We Vikings liked to sacrifice things to the gods, whether it be livestock or our enemies. Even more important was the means. Sacrifices were usually carried out by gutting livestock with a knife, burning the offering sometimes meant it was important. The problem was less the act of doing so, since we sacrificed things all the time, but rather why he was doing it. It was for my sake. Since I was a monster. The last time my dad did anything of the sort, I was told it was about my mother.

"Why would he burn up three yaks?" Toothless inquired. I haven't really explained Norse religious customs to him, so it came as no surprise he had no idea. Gobber raised an eye brow.

"Toothless doesn't get the whole, sending things to the gods by burning them thingâ€¦" Which technically more my confusion, rather than his. I mean, how does burning something to ash send that object to Odin's Hall? Does he reconfigure it from the ashes piece by piece?

"Yeah, it does sound kind of strange doesn't it?" said Toothless.

"Oh, is that all?" Gobber said. "Well, we can probably explain it in detail later, for now, I think we should be going on our way." Toothless nodded.

I was done shortly. My new clothes fit about as well as my old ones did to me on my old body, which was good as I wearing something that actually fit me. Unfortunately, I was not going to be wearing boots due to my warped feet. I wasn't so concerned about walking barefoot, since they had changed enough to allow me to walk barefoot comfortably. I was more worried about people looking at my feet and freaking out. On top of that, I was missing my eye patch, so anyone who looked at my face would see that I was a freak. I sighed. It was better I got this out of the way as soon as I could. Maybe I could find exile in some nice cave somewhere away from my own reflection.

"See you around, bud," Toothless and I both said at the exact same time. We both gave each other big grins.

Gobber, providing me with the support I needed, helped me walk into the village of Berk.

* * *

><p>I waited there for a few moments, until I was sure Hiccup and his teacher had left. Mostly, I just wanted to set my priorities for the day and I needed time to think on what I wanted to do. For the first time in a moon, I was given the freedom to choose what my actions were. I was a guest here, free to do as a wish, to do as I pleased. I sighed and yet, Hiccup was still in bondage. And there was nothing I could do about it till later.<p>

I inspected the bag Gobber gave me once more. It seems strange to think that such tiny scraps of metal could be used to exchange services, not unlike fish and favors. My Kin really only traded fish around for labor or services, since unlike the Herd, since we did not value possessions or things as highly. Mostly, it was things such as a contract for the Mating Season or teaching lessons or fighting. Unlike fish however, I would no need to worry about it spoiling, or accidentally eating my wages, again. I have really come to appreciate not using my mouth to move everything.

The odd thing was, I could not help but think that I had seen these 'coins' before somewhere, though I could not remember where. Sure, I had seen them all the time as soon as Camicazi started 'acquiring' the materials we needed to make that special arrow Hiccup wanted to make, but I had the sinking feeling that there was another time I had seen 'money' before. I just could not remember whereâ€¦ Maybe it wasn't that important if I forgot it so easily.

Several knocks on the door distracted me from my thoughts. I opened it and saw the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut. "Hey, Toothless, just the guy were looking for," said the male one.

"Is Hiccup up yet?" said his sister.

I said. "Why what do you need him for?"

"We wanted him to whip up that dragon potion thing that you gave Snotlout," said the female.

"So we can become dragons and breathe fire and fly andâ€¦ stuffâ€¦"

I sighed. Why was it always the people who did not want to change their species end up getting changed into something else? "Hiccup's not getting exiled," I firmly stated, even though I did not really know if he was going to be exiled or not. If it was anything like being exiled from my Kinâ€¦ No, best not think about it. "Well, he just left along with Gobber to go to the Tribal Council, whatever that is." It must have been something similar to the King's General Audience, only without a central figure, like my Lord.

"Great, we can attend and ask him there." Tuffnut

"Gobber said adults onlyâ€¦" I commented.

"Pft, what's the worst they can do?" Ruffnut stated.

"Kick us out?"

"Yesâ€¦" Well, maybe they could do worse, but forcing us out uninvited was a good starting point. Clawing the eyes out and ripping out the tongue were the kinds of punishments done in the King's Court. You needed a very good reason to attend uninvited.

"Bah, who asked you?" said the twins, who both asked me. So, were they saying their question was rhetorical or did they really forget about asking me a question?

"Look, as much as I want to be by Hiccup's side right now." Which was a lot. "I have other things I need to be doing right now?"

"Like what?"

"Shopping for clothesâ€¦" I stuttered. I almost did not want to say anything. All I really knew about these two were from hearsay from Hiccup and the incident the other night involving that skull and an eating contest. I was not sure of how they'd react to that knowledgeâ€¦

The two eye each other, grins forming in their mouths. "Get him!" they cried. With a swift motion of their arms, I found myself suddenly wrapped up in a coil of twisted rope and metal spheres. A bolas, I think it was. I tried to struggle out of it, but my arms were bound too tightly for me to escape. Then the twins lifted me up on their shoulders and started carrying me out of the house's threshold.

"Hey, put me down!" I was so pathetic. I had no possible way to resist them as they carried me throughout town.

"As if," said the female.

"Where are you taking me?"

The male replied cheerily, "Shopping!"

"This is your idea of shopping?" I looked out, my eyes pleading for help at any of the Herd to save me. They just looked at me for a split second, then went about on their way, uninterested. It was as if this was expected, a given.

"Nope, ours involves more bloodloss," said Tuffnut.¹

Shortly, after I stopped trying to wiggle my way out of their grasp, we arrived at the apparent destination. The twins carried me into a building of some sort. They threw me on the ground with a loud thud and shut the door behind. Then, they quickly undid my bindings.

I looked around a bit. There were shelves everywhere lined full of things. Lots of things, more so than I had seen in Hiccup's home. I could make out the piles and shelves stocked full of weaponry, fabric, and other miscellaneous items I did know the names or descriptions of. "What is this place?"

"A store, duh!" Ruffnut said.

"Even we're smart enough to know thatâ€¦" Somehow the idea that I was more ignorant than the twins just made me feel reallyâ€¦ stupid. It was as if I should have really known where we were.

Still, I suppose, it was nice of them to 'invite' me over. I got up, and found that there was no one else here. If this was anything like how trades with my Kin were made, there should have been a proprietor, an owner, or a representative of the service. I found no one. "Soâ€¦ where's the owner?"

The male responded, "Oh, he's out. Something about a concussion."

"So then who runs this place?"

"Us." I think my blood ran cold at Tuffnut's single word. "We're running the store for the owner till he wakes up."

"Or not." said the female. With the small sampling of what I have seen of the twin's behavior, I found it very peculiar for them to be chosen to run a 'store'. Only the mad or truly desperate would deal with them.

"Why you?" I asked, to get an answer for my current confusion.

"Chief's punishing us for being stowaways on his ship. They took our yak, man! We won't get him back til we pay the fine." So this was a punishment? I got most of what the boy said after translating it into terms I was more familiar with.

"So we thought about getting some!" said the female. "So we thought maybe we can get Hiccupâ€¦"

"And if he wouldn't come, maybe we could also get his dragon potion whatever it was." Tuff.

"So, let me get this straight," I said, putting the pieces together. "Your idea to solve your lack of customers is the bully a dragonâ€¦"

And when you couldn't find Hiccup, you decide to abduct me, then force me to shop in your store?" To be fair, I was also one of the Kin.

"Yup! Isn't it a brilliant idea?" said the female, "I came up with it." Alright, out of all of the weird Viking things I have learned so this would be the weirdest hands down the weirdest. Kidnapping someone and then forcing them to shop at your store did not seem right to me.

"No, you didn't!" said the male, heaving a small, wooden crate filled with looked like identical pairs of boots. "It was me!" Putting it on a nearby table, he gave me a pair of boots. He glared at his sister but spoke to me. "Now, put these on."

I haven't actually worn shoes since I had changed, since our hosts did not think it was important to give a new pair to their captives. Hiccup's friends however kept whatever shoes they had when they were captive. I did not see the point though. Why wear shoes when you had perfectly good feet? On the other hand, my feet were always the part of my body that seemed to get cold first.

Imitating an action I had only seen, rather than done for myself, I placed the boots on my feet. They were an exact fit, as if they were meant to go on my feet. I felt rather odd, yet strangely comforting. I took a few steps, noting that my feet felt somewhat â€| safer with something between it and a potentially splintered wooden floor. They were also warmer, not being exposed to the autumn air. Maybe this was why humans wore shoes? "These are kind of nice," I said.

That was a mistake. Ruffnut knocked me flat on my back and yanked off my boots. "No, try these!" She placed an identical pair of boots on my foot. So much so that I almost thought they were the same pair of boots as Tuffnut gave me.

"What's so special about these?" I said from the ground.

"They bludgeoned a bear!" I raised my eyes brows at that. Boots of Bear Bludgeoning, really? I think I would pay for the story about that.

"Pft, mine are still better!" said the male, struggling to take off my shoes while engaging in yet another grappling contest with his sister. Honestly, they were like the exact opposite of a Zippleback. They were arguing about which of a pair of identical shoes was better than the other. That made no senseâ€| even less sense than the circumstances that led me to my current condition.

"Uh, I think I'll buy that pair." I picked up a completely unrelated pair of boots, that seemed to be completely identical to the previous two I had been offered. I removed the boots Ruffnut gave me.

The two looked at each other and then to me and the male said, "Yeah, we don't recommend that one."

I placed the new pair of boots on my feetâ€| and then the boots promptly fell apart into separate pieces. "It wasn't finishedâ€|" said the female. I really was cursed, wasn't I?

Deciding on another neutral response, I just took the left boot of

Ruff's offering alongside Tuff's right. This did nothing to help keep the peace. At least the boots were not falling apart at the seams. "See, he likes my boots more."

"Oh yeah, he got mine first."

"Maybe we can go for actual clothes nowâ€¦" I suggested, again me realizing I should learn not to encourage the duo. As soon as I said that, the pair went off to one of the nearby shelves of fabric and pulled out a dozen bundles each. The twins both hurriedly placed the bundles of cloth and fabric at my feet. I did not see any tunics or trousers in the store, at least, nothing that seemed to be in my size, so the bundles of fabric confused me. "So, what's this for?" I asked.

"For your clothes, duh." said Ruffnut.

"And people say we're idiots..." I just glowered at the two of them. To be fair though, I was still so ignorant of human things.

"Soâ€¦ what do I do?" I asked.

"Just pick what you like." Ruffnut.

"And we'll turn it into clothes for you later." That was only going to end in disaster. I mean, the twins were going to make me clothes out of fabric. I think I would be lucky if the building I was in did not burn down during that.

"You mean you'll make clothes, out of this?" Maybe it was like blacksmithing? Raw materials are converted into a different form through the use of labor. The only difference is that the materials were fabrics.

"Well, not us, but we know someone who will." Okay, that was a relief. I would not have to worry about something being set on fire because of my ignoranceâ€¦ unless the person who they were talking about might be even worse than they were.

"Uh, sureâ€¦" I said. I looked down at the piles of cloth while the twins went back to bickering about â€¦ everything it seemed like. I ignored them as best as I could, even when their wrestling made them step atop the fabrics I was inspecting. Honestly, how did Hiccup or anyone really put up with these two?

Several of the bundles of cloth appealed to me, such as this blue fabric that felt rather smooth to the touch or these green ones that resembled the fabric used in Hiccup's clothing. I should know, what I was wearing provided a nice comparison on contrast.

I eventually decided to select two different shades of red, woolen material, mostly because I felt it appealed to meâ€¦ and because I could easily tell my clothes apart from anyone else. Also, because it was the color of blood. "Okay, so what now?" I said as I handed off the two bundles to Ruff and Tuff. At this point, the two were now using a strange string of some sort. They placed it several places around my body and wrote down things on a note book. Even though I was fairly new at this whole writing thing, I somehow had the impression that they were doing something wrong.

"Well, now that's done, how about some winter accessories?" said Ruffnut.

"Yeah, winter's coming soon." And with that, the mating season. My Kin put all of this pomp and circumstance for the mating and hatchling rearing rituals. I was not a part of it, most of the time.

"Don't forget Snoggletog." That name was incredibly stupid, but it was very likely to be the human mating event. Hopefully I was wrong.

"So what do you have in mind?" I said, once again proving that I might actually be dumber than the twins.

"Well, how about some furs?" said Tuff. He showed me to a table of animal pelts, more or less still in the rough shape of their former owners. I wonder what the Herd did to prevent the animal skins from rotting. There were a few rather interesting choices such as elk, fox, and even a bear.

However, I was instantly gravitated to a black pelt, one which I believed belonged to a wolf based on its size and rough shape. I wanted something to reflect what I really was. A black coat like this, reminded me of the scales I once had, the armor of night that shielded me. We were both creatures of the night, after all. Though the beast was ultimately land bound, I decided it would have to do. Unfortunately, the head part was removed, but that was fine by me. "How about this?"

"Excellent choice," Ruffnut said.

"Now, pay up." Tuffnut said. I did as he asked, providing the coin he needed, which was most of what Hiccup's father had given me. All of my Kin knew how to count, if for nothing else to ensure that a trade or a deal went as intended. It was when math such as addition or subtraction, as Hiccup called it, that things got really interesting. Fortunately, I was learning in those areas. Oddly enough, I was the one who had to do the actual price calculation. Was that normal?

"Have a nice day," said the twins, as they went back to wrestling each other in their own store. Other than my new boots, I was not taking anything else. I was to return tomorrow morning to pick up my clothes, meaning I was to spend another day wearing Hiccup's castoffs. Unfortunate, but at least I would have something to say about that.

I was about to leave the store, my business concluded. Then suddenly, I saw something in the corner of my eye. I turn my head and saw that there was an object that was glowing on one of the walls. It must have been a firefly or piece of metal or something. Whatever it was, I wanted to get to it. Finders keepers, after all. Leaping at the shining thing, I tried to grab hold onto it with my hands.

I missed. The object, whatever it was managed to slip past both my hands. I swiftly tried to move one of my hands to take the glowing object yet again, but I still managed to miss it entirely. I repeated this process, trying to figure out what was going on. It was not until a minute from now that I realized that my results were futile.

It must have been one really agile and nearly invisible fireflyâ€|

I got up from where I was and suddenly the glowing light disappeared. How odd. I bent down to look at where it was and suddenly it reappeared. That was peculiar. I started moving around, my gaze constantly focused on the wall the light was, noting that the only light disappeared when I stood in a specific place, for some odd reason. What did this? Why?

Then I noticed that the light I was looking at was a beam of light, coming from somewhere else. It was like sunlight, except, not coming from the sky. I turned and looked at the source. It appeared to be a wooden object of some sort, a device that had two legs, with a large brass oval in it. From the oval, I saw what looked to be an image of the roof with a light coming from the center of it. I looked upwards, at the roof and found that there was a small hole where sunlight entered into the building. I walked towards the device, it having taken my attention. I tilted it in one direction and the light going to the wall moved elsewhere. I turned and twisted the device on its hinge, bending the light beam to my whims.

I stopped, when I suddenly saw a boy, a black haired boy in the oval. I blinked, repeatedly, wondering how the boy entered theâ€|whatever it was. I tried to reach toward him, my hand cautiously touching the mirror. The boy's hand did the same and touched me in the exact same fashion. "What happened to you?" I asked. The boy in the mirror opened his mouth and though he tried to say words, I could not hear him. "Are you okay?" Again he tried to say something, but failed. I moved my hand away, only for the boy in the object to do the same thing. It wasn't until then that I realized that it was not a boy. It was a reflection, a self image, like what I could see in water if the conditions were just rightâ€| only this was not water. It was some sort of Herd invention, one that also redirected beams of sunlight.

That boy in that _thing, _whatever it was, was me. He was not a creature, born out of lightning and death. He was not one of the proud Kin with great wings and dark scales. He was not a Night Fury. He was a boy. I was a boy. I was not a dragon anymore.

I never really thought about it till now. When Hiccup's father saw me, when anyone else who did not know of my origins saw me. They did not see a dragon, a creature that should be slain or captured on sight. No, they saw this image of me. They only saw that boy. The skinny and black haired boy that I saw. A boy that befriended his son, his boy. That was a lie. I was not that boy.

But was it really a lie anymore? I have changed much in the past moon. Was I really a dragon anymore? The fact that I use the term 'dragon' to determine my identity and not 'Kin' was telling. None of my Kin did that.

Did any of my Kin know as much as I did? None of the Kin knew of blacksmithing or of marksmanship. In fact, many of my Kin were simply incapable of such things. They all still saw humans both our kinds likely regard birds.

Have any of my Kin had to change their very identity as I have had to? I had a name now. It was not from the King, but I accepted it anyways. I considered myself as 'Toothless' not simply 'Night Fury'

anymore.

If I could go back to being a dragon, could I _really_ be a dragon again?_ I was a completely different being since that I have left the Nest. I was no longer ignorant of the world of humans and | a part of me liked that world. The world of ships and sails, the world where my hands can make things to my desires, the world where knowledge was not only sung, but written down on paper, on books. I was still learning about that world and every day, I still found myself wanting to delve deeper.

I opened my mouth and saw for the first time, my own _human_ teeth. A couple of teeth here and there were missing. According to Fishlegs, a submolar, a canine, and an incisor, whatever those were. Teeth were teeth, they did not need fancy names. If I was still a dragon. I would have had a full mouth in only after a few days. Those holes were likely not going to filled any time soon. Human teeth did grow back and I was human now.

Am I really so weak? Why was it so easy for me to be so accepting of _my humanity?_

I walked away from the strange device. I did not want to think too deeply about it. I could spend hours, looking at my reflection, looking for answers only to find nothing.

As I exited the shop, I found the twins, fighting yet again. This time, they were fighting over a little disk of light that shone on the wooden walls. I don't think they would ever learn where that light came from.

* * *

><p>Walking towards the Great Hall had never been so painful before. My body and my heart were tested as I stood through the market place, everyone seeing what had become of me. I figure that if my father hadn't revealed my | deformity already, I was going to do so my own. I might have hidden my eye and my leg from Alvin, but I could never hide my tail without it being really obvious. It would have been far too much work and would have just placed me in another cage. I have disappointed my father enough times already, I should own up my mistakes. Especially when those mistakes began to effect others. I just hoped Snotlout or his father did not decide to chop my head off.<p>

With Gobber providing me the physical and emotional support I needed, I walked through familiar houses and faces. Most villagers did not outright hate me, they more or less tolerated my existence as long as I did not do anything that bothered them. For most of my life, I have been wanting to change their opinion of me. I succeeded.

Most, I could see, made the conscious decision to ignore me, as was usual. Some of them decided to hide their children the moment I walked by their houses, whispering cautionary tales not to become like me. Others looked at me with menace, the intent of murder in their eyes. A few had more curious or surprisingly empathic expressions. At least, I have not made the _entirety_ _of Berk hate me.

It went on like that for what must have been an hour before I reached

the mouth of Great Hall. There were many Vikings gathered there, mostly dressed in battle garb. I saw Snotlout moving his way up the stairs toward the main door. I did not see my father, meaning he was likely inside. As I approached, Snotlout turned and looked at me, surprised that I was awake. "Hiccup?" he said in disbelief. I said nothing. His eyes narrowed, his face contorting to rage. "It's because of you I'm like this!" Though Toothless was the one who gave him the potion, I brewed it. "Now my dadâ€¦!"

"Easy there, boy," said Gobber. "We don't know what's going to happen to you yet." Except for us freaks getting exiled.

"I hope whatever happens to me, happens to you, first." Snotlout turned around and walked up the steps once more. Gobber and I followed him inside.

There were dozens upon dozens of Vikings, all gathered around the firepit in the center of the hall. In the center, gathered directly around the fire, was my father plus every member of the Tribal Council, each a man or woman wielded great physical and political power. They already seemed to be discussing something, though I could not know what. I did not know most of them personally, but I've seen most them fight. And considering the matter likely involved sorcery, it came as no surprise that Gothi was involved. She was next to impossible to see through the crowd and I only saw her because of her staff.

Overall, this seemed to be a fairly standard trial. Which was odd because of its subject matter. When exactly was the last time anyone had went to trial for turning into a dragon?

Gobber had to force several townsfolk out of the way to provide us with room. As it was a trial for both me and Snotlout, we had to gather around the close to the firepit. The three of us, me, Gobber, and Snotlout approached the fire pit slowly. The fire was warm, soothing. I almost wanted to jump in the pit and let it embrace me. The discussion that the Council made was clearer now. "So, are we sure about this?" said one of the Council members, a blonde man with a large beard. I could not remember his name or the names of most of the Council members off the top of my head.

"Yes," said a woman, a Brunette. "We can negotiate with most of the other tribes, fairly easily. I'm sure most of them would be glad to see their own returned to them." I understood that they were discussing about the slaves I had freed to fight alone side of us.

"Well, except for the Ugli-thugs."

"And the Murderous."

"The Hysterics are a bit on the fence."

"Then it is decided," my father concluded, standing directly across from me, but not seeing me. I noticed there was a large mug by his side. He must have been drinking it not too long ago. "We send Alvin's captives plus a warning about Alvin in exchange for diplomatic favor." Finally, some good news. No one should have to be enslaved like they did. It was good to hear that my father was letting most of them go free. If anything, I at least brought some

good to someone's life. I was not a complete and total failure.

"Well, I'm glad that got decided while we were away," Gobber announced. "And just in time, too. I've got both of them Stoick."

All eyes turned their attention to me and Snotlout. Well, mostly me, much to my cousin's satisfaction. "He's awake?" "It's true isn't it? Look at his eye!" "How is that possible?" "He should have been out for at least a month!" "Didn't he lose his legs?" And many other expressions of disbelief.

"Lost them, then I grew them back," I said calmly. I lifted up my tail, displaying it for everyone to see. "And a little bit extra." If I was going to get exiled, I might as well face it. I stunned everyone into silence.

My dad took another drink out of his mug and tossed it away. "My son," he began. It was probably just a formality, rather than him still considering me his son. "And Snotlout— Do you two realize why you are here?"

My cousin and I both eyed each other, the same thought entering our heads. "Yes," we both replied.

"And what would that be?" said the brunette.

"Aren't you going to banish him?" asked Snotlout.

Gobber replied. "If it were so easy to determine your fate, we would not be in this room."

I just blinked, dazed. They weren't so sure about banishing me? I had been anticipating being disowned and cast into the sea as soon as my father knew as I was awake. I was a freak, a monster. I was also not someone that was really considered worth much before. It should have been a really simple decision. Except that nothing that involves me rarely is so simple— I wonder if Thor ever had to put up with this. "So then, what am I here for?"

"To speak," said my father. "To speak so that we may learn what to do with you. Snotlout, as we had been expecting you this morning, you will go first." I took a step back and allowed my cousin to get into the spotlight. "Now, as you've been forced into your position while you were unable to resist, you will not be exiled or be stripped of your status as a warrior."

At that statement, Snotlout and I bowed our heads in relief. His father, Spitelout, another member on the Council, eyed his son, furiously.

"But at the same time, you did essentially bring harm to yourself by stowing away aboard my ship and forcing yourselves onto battle," spoke the blond bearded man.

This caused everyone in the room to erupt into chattering. Finally, I knew why my father brought Snotlout and the twins into a raid of all places. While we all lived, the battle field was no place for a child. Probably the only reason we survived was because we were

harder to notice due to our heights. "What?" said Snotlout.

"While you performed responsibly given the resources, we, the Council," said Snotlout's father, a hint of anger in his voice. "find it necessary to still levy a punishment for your disregard of authority, especially in a battle, and encouraging others to do the same." My cousin was visibly recoiling at it, though I could not tell to where it was being directed to. To Snotlout for making a mess or to the other Council members for making the excuse.

"But-Butâ€¦" Snotlout sputtered, struggling to find words.
"It'sâ€¦"

"Now, now, the twins have already received theirs," said my father. I shuddered to imagine what kind of punishment the twins would receive. It must be the kind of thing that would drive people insane. "Like them, you will be temporarily employed at a fairly simple part-time job. The twins are currently working as storekeepers." Well, if anything, the twins would drive the customers insane.

"I'm already being punished," protested Snotlout. "I am cursed!"

"I agree," I said. "Snotlout does not deserve to be punished further, because his condition is already difficult enough." I must have lost my mind, or worse, found it. I was willing to defend Snotlout of all peopleâ€¦ Well, I was willing to defend a dragon, so maybe this was normal for me now.

"Yeah, what he said," said Snotlout. Funny how he was quick to change his opinion.

"And what about you, aren't you the one who started this mess?" shouted someone in the crowd. "Yeah, he's the one who made Alvin as powerful as he is!" "I lost a brother cause of Alvin!" A cascade of comments and arguments formed in reply to me.

My father slammed down his mug on hard stone so hard that it broke into a dozen pieces. "Order! I will have Order in these Halls." It worked well enough that the conversations all promptly died. "Gothi what is your take on all of this?" As he said that, my father bent down and had the small old woman whisper something into his ear. "I see. Gothi says that we should postpone the final judgment on Snotlout until Hiccup's fate is determined. All those in favor?"

Every member of the Council, most of the townsfolk, and myself agreed without a doubt.

"Then it is decided then," Spitelout said. "Our first order of business is to determine the motivation of your actions. What led you to practice thisâ€¦ craft of yours?"

"I just wanted to make myself stronger, become more of what I was supposed to be, not what I was." At my words, my father's face contorted into a slight frown. I could tell he was hiding it, trying to hide it from the public view, but I spent a long enough time with him to know what he was hiding. "For my whole life, I have lived in the shadow of a man that could chop down trees with his bare hands and scares dragons by showing up. I wanted to live up to that." I think that might have just torn up a little part of my father's heart

right now, but I couldn't just lie about the thing that had been bothering me for most of my life.

"Then why are you becomingâ€¦ wellâ€¦" said one of the other men, trying to be somewhat considerate.

"A dragon," I finished his own statement. "I don't know why. The potion I learned how to make, the substance that causes these changes, I don't understand it completely. In fact, I don't even know why Alvin, Snotlout, or I turn into different dragons eachâ€¦" Or why Alvin and I were turning into dragons who had no part in any of the components of the recipes. Or why pain causes the changes. Or really anything that mattered.

The brunette stated, "You should have spoken to Gothi, who is your senior in this field, so that you might not have gotten into this mess."

I nodded.

"Well, what do we do, now?" said the bearded blonde, councilor. "We can't exile him."

"And why not?" asked Spitelout and me and essentially everyone else.

"He's far too valuable," said the blonde councilor.

My father spoke up. At this point, he pulled out something from out of folded cloth. It was a hand, one with very, very large finger nails. Alvin's hand. "It was by his hand that Alvin lost his, no one else can claim hold of anything else like that, not even I."

"He's still a freak," said someone in the crowd. "He's barely a boy anymore." The speaker approached the firepit, a staff held in his hand. It was Mildew, the only man on Berk who could claim to be less popular than me. The old man was a veteran and at one time a famed explorer. I heard it had to do something about his wife leaving him. "You'd be best off chopping of his limbsâ€¦"

"Alvin tried that," I stated dryly. "They grow back." I wonder if Alvin would regrow his hand eventually.

"If only Bucket had that when he had his head injuryâ€¦" said a man in the crowd. I believe Mulch, a fisherman my father knew, spoke that statement.

"He will turn on us," complained Mildew. "He'll join our enemies before long."

"My son's loyalty is not in question. He has not shown any betrayal against our his own people nor intentionally broken any of our laws." said my father. "It is clear that his becoming whatâ€¦he is now was an unintended consequence that sprung from his desire to improve his lot within the Tribe. I mean, honestly, just because someone turns into something else does not mean they are now the enemy, you know." Hearing that from my dad justâ€¦ I was glad. My dad still considered me his son, even now. I was however guilty with a single violation of the law, supporting a dragonâ€¦ Hopefully dad will warm up to Toothless enough to look past it.

"You say that now," said Mildew. "And I am still not convinced Alvin is that big of a threat."

Some warriors who were present at the battle spoke up. "Alvin bested no less than four masters and prodigies of warfare at the same time!" "On top of being next to impossible to kill!" "Alvin can catch _arrows!"_

"You should have seen him, Mildew," my father started. "Before, Alvin was a second rate fighter, who I have beaten on many numerous occasions. Now he's a demon on the battlefield, a killing machine I could barely hold my own against him."

"All it would take to bring Alvin down is a chop to the head," said the old man, who seemed rather sure of himself.

"He's too strong and fast for me to do that," said my father. "My son said that he wanted to become strongerâ€|He worked for him and well, it certainly worked out for Alvin, too."

At my father's statement, Gothi tapped her staff and drew the attention of everyone. She wrote something on a piece of paper so and showed it to my father and to the rest of the Council. "Gothi are you sure about this?" said more or less everyone involved. There were murmurs of confusion and further questioning by the rest of the Tribe, with their intensity only growing as they learned more about what was being proposed.

"The Proving is a time honored tradition for the best graduates of dragon training, modifying it, just like that isâ€| wrong."

"We've already postponed the Choosing for a week now because of the raid on Outcast Island and now we're delaying it even further on top of changing the selection method."

"Gothi is the one who makes and enforces the rules about the Proving," said Spitelout. "If she wants to make any changes, she is free to do so." Spitelout seemed to be rather cheery about the news, so that meant it was not good for me.

"Gothi has proposed a solution to our dilemma," said my father. "In lieu of tradition, both Snotlout and Hiccup will fight against the six best members of their generation in dragon training class to decide who fights the Nightmare. This is not voluntary and they will be expected to fight in the Kill Ring two weeks from now. We shall decide their fates then. Best in show will be allowed to face the Nightmare in the Proving the day afterwards." I turned and faced my cousin, our jaws both agape. I was also sure that half the room was dead to the world and the other half chattered loud enough to raise the dead.

"Oh good," said Gobber. "That Monstrous Nightmare we caught has just been sitting in the same spot ever since we caught itâ€| We know how much we should ration its food until then."

"Why do this?" someone shouted.

My father sighed. "We now live in a world where our greatest enemies can become powerful abominations. Traditional methods of fighting

dragons are not going to work against an enemy who is both dragon and man. We must be prepared for that. And for thatâ€¦ we need to see how effective our next generation is at fighting them."

This silenced most of everyone's concerns. "But dad," I said. "Alvin could not make the potion on his own, he tried brewing it but it kept failing to work. As far as I know, I'm the only one can make it. And on top of that, I know how to make the arrows that greatly wounded him yesterday. Is it really necessary?"

"My son, Alvin is no fool. Though you deceived him once, he learns from his mistakes. It's very likely that if he tried brewing the potion for himself, he might have made a copy of the recipe to find out a way to figure it out." I had not thought about that. Alvin did seem intelligent enough to have a backup plan. If he did, that meant that with enough experimentationâ€¦ who knew what was possible?

"All those in favor?" said my father. Most of the Council, including Spitelout, who must have seen this as a gift from Odin, responded with an "aye" and a raised hand. In fact, the only one who I knew who did not approve were Mildew, Snotlout and myself. "Then it is decided."

"You expect me to work with him?" Snotlout stated.

"Unfortunately, they doâ€¦" I said to Snotlout. Just what was our Elder even thinking? My legs had just grown back this morning, they were dreadfully weak. While I was at least strong enough to stand on my own now that I had some exercise, there was no telling how effective they would be in two weeks time. Though, my normally physical rehabilitation would take at least several days or weeks, not hours. Then again, so were scabs.

"You both heard me," said my father. "Gothi has declared a rather unorthodox solution, but it is one that the Council and the majority can agree upon. Both of you are dismissed."

I sighed and forced my way out of the crowd. I just wanted to be left alone.

Thankfully I got my wish, no one seemed to really want to interact with me beyond just exchanging a stare of some sort. Maybe there was a warning about my condition and there were orders not to kill me, because it was clear everyone wanted to stay at least a few yards away from me. With my legs having gotten strong enough that I could walk on my own, I headed into the woods, wandering just a bit. I needed the fresh air to get myself thinking.

Eventually, my wanderings came to a stop when I discovered this massive sinkhole, a depression in the ground that formed sheer cliffs in a circle pattern. It was a beautiful place that featured its own lake and a nice clearing. Unfortunately, the only entrance was this small cave on one side of the area. Anything that was too large to fit inside that small entrance would likely starve to death if it got caught inside the sinkhole.

I sat by the water's edge, contemplating. I saw my reflection, the distorted visage I wore. There was no way, even with my increased physical ability, that I could best even one of the best my generation had to offer. Three would probably cut me into ribbons and

mount by body parts on a trophy wall. Six on two, was not a fair fight. What was the point of having us horribly outnumbered against the best the Hooligian youth had to offer? Sure, Snotlout was ranked near the top on most circles, but I was on the bottom. I was fairly sure I was not even needed.

I was certainly not going to be recognizable after the fight. While I have succeeded in avoiding damaging myself unless I got involved with Alvin on Outcast Island, that was mostly due to me not being an important target. The longer the fight went on, the less human I was guaranteed to be even if I did survive.

So now, I was facing less humanity and exile, instead of just exile. I cursed my luck. Why couldn't I have just done the smart thing and learned how to make fireballs and throw lightning around? That would have been far safer and more socially acceptable. I heard stories about powerful sorcerers and gods doing things like that, why couldn't I have tried that instead of doing something like trying to change my body's weaknesses?

Exiling myself would have been far easierâ€¦

I got out from the water's edge and looked up at the sky. Hours have passed with sunset slowly approaching. I decided that it was time to go home. Besides, my dad at least

I heard something on my way back. The sound of metal digging into wood really hard and there it was again the same sound. This odd noise kept repeating itself as I approached it. I had a good idea of who was causing it. I turned and found Astrid throwing simple hatchets at every tree within range. She was training with some cheap single headed axes, a budget replacement for her scrapped heirloom. Currently, she was dressed in slacks and a tunic, something she wore to replace the fact her ensemble had more or less been taken from her while in Alvin's 'care'.

"Astrid," I said.

"Hiccup?" she said as she turned to my direction. For a moment she stared down at legs, apparently she had not heard about that. "Uhâ€¦ that'sâ€¦ interestingâ€¦"

"Uh, yeahâ€¦" It felt very awkward talking about my legs.

"So," Astrid changed the subject. "I heard you were awakeâ€¦ and about what happened in the village."

"Yeah, so in two weeks, I'm going to get myself horribly injured by six people never met before." All things considered, getting mauled to death by teenagers was probably a normal affair in the Dark Ages.

Astrid just shook her head. "Well, fiveâ€¦"

Five? "I thought there were six. Did dad convince Gothi to reduce the number of combatants?"

"Five you never met beforeâ€¦ You know number six." And suddenly I knew who was going to be leading

The truth was something I did like at all. My blood ran cold at the thought of fighting Astrid. Technically, Astrid never took the Dragon Training class, but she had practical combat experience, which was often worth just as much. Plus, given that we all had two weeks before the big event, it wasn't hard to believe that she would be taking her classes during that timeframe, especially since she and Fishlegs did not have the share the dragons with the other classes. There might have also been political plays involved, such as citing her imprisonment as a reason to have 'makeup classes'. So overall, it made sense that she was being added to the roster even though she did not graduate. "You're going to fight me?" I asked. She nodded. "I am so doomed. You're going to squash me like a bug."

"Hiccupâ€¦"

"You were right," I said, sitting down at the base of a tree. "I'm no warriorâ€¦"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," I looked up at her.

"What do you mean?"

"I was wrong about him you knowâ€¦" Was she was speaking about Toothless? "For a dragon, he'sâ€¦ noble, trust worthy, honorableâ€¦" I could not believe what I was hearing. Astrid was accepting of a dragon. That in itself should be a sign that the Twilight of the Gods was nearing. "And maybe I was wrong about you, too."

"Uh, what?" I was dumbstruck.

"Only a real Viking warrior faces certain death by running at it," I saw her smile. "And only the greatest can do that while being too stubborn to die."

"I cheated," I said. Most Vikings did not heal at the rates Alvin and I did. "What are you getting at Astrid?"

"Hiccup, I never thought I would be saying this, but you've got the potential to be a great warrior in your own right."

"But what about our deal?" I said, calling back to the early morning of our abduction. "I was to abandon trying to be a warrior and go offâ€¦ bread making or something, after that."

"That was if you missed taking down Toothlessâ€¦ and we both know how that turned out."

I just sighed. No man was ever going to understand girls and was too horribly inept to make sense of Astrid. She clear wanted me to do something, but I am too thick to understand it. "Okay, Astrid, what is it you want from me?"

"When our little showdown happens, I want you to fight me with everything you've got. I won't hold back unless I risk killing you, and so should you."

"But why?"

"Because I do not want to fight a depressed boy who's afraid of

getting hurt because it caused him to grow scales." That got my attention. She more or less described my mood ever since Fishlegs shot me in the foot. "When we fight, I want us both to enjoy it, like real warriors should." She considered me a real warriorâ€¦ I did not know what to think about that.

I spent a moment of silence there, thinking on what to reply. I decided on a topic, one which I felt responsible for. "I'm sorry about your axe, Astrid. I knew how much it meant to you."

"Yeah, I just wish I could have taken it with me in the Proving," she said. Most people knew about the connection of Astrid's axe and Fearless Finn Hofferson and his fall. Part of the reason why Astrid trained so much was to redeem her family honor ever since her Uncle died all those years ago. "It was a good axe. Dad says we can mount it over the fireplaceâ€¦"

"If I ever have time, I'll see about making you a replacement," I offered as I stood up.

"Just don't think that's going to make things easy on you Hiccup, I still intend to get to be top of the class and go kill that Nightmareâ€¦" Then I suddenly had a strange thought. If Toothless was right and all dragons are more or less human level in intelligence, wouldn't that mean the Nightmare, and all the other dragons, were people in of themselves. Sure, they got captured after failing to steal our own food, but they thought of us as animals as well. I do not think Toothless was going to be too thrilled to learn about how we treated our prisonersâ€¦ I must have been thinking too hard as Astrid had a concerned expression on her face. "Is something wrong?"

I hold her. "Astrid, is it really, okay for us to go kill the Nightmare in the Kill Ring?"

"What do you mean?" said Astrid.

"Dragons aren't animals," I said. "We shouldn't treat them like they are. That makes us no better than Alvin if we take dragons and execute them the way we use them for training."

Astrid sighed. "Maybe one day, you'll stop trying to change the world I live in."

"Sorry, but the world and I aren't on the best of terms right now," I said.

"I've got to get going soon, my parents are expecting me home in an hour or so." Astrid said. The sky was visibly darkening with night coming shortly afterwards. She went off in the direction of the trees she was struck earlier and began pulling axes loose. I helped her a bit. "But, if it's that important to you, I'll try to think about the whole Nightmare thing." I nodded and she turned and walked away.

"Oh, Astrid!" I said before she was out of earshot.

"What is it?"

"Thank you," I said. At that, she smiled. I smiled back. Today, I

learned that Astrid did not believe I was a total failure. She had more faith in me than I had in myself. Maybe I should start believing that, too.

* * *

><p>Because this might bear some explanation, Snotlout's transformatio is interesting. In the books, he's Hiccup's enemy, but in the movie he's also the one Hiccup tries to encourage dragon training before anyone else. So to draw a parallel, that gets involved here as him getting forcibly transformed by Toothless. I also decided to give some reason for hostility. I hope I can portray that well.

**For those of you wondering about that whole Proving deal, I imagine politics can warp things a little. **

Oh also, Mildewâ€| has an interesting relevancy to this storyâ€| Though you may have to guess why.

To make up for the utter hell that Hiccup has gone through, I've given him a few small victories to help ease his suffering.

Also, since I could not reply to you "Matt", I would like to say that you are right about the King being the Red Death. As for his motivationsâ€| I would like to inform you not view him the same way as you would in other fanfics. He's well, slightly different in this story.

A special thanks to Thorborn for providing me with some Norse religious details.

10. Chapter 10

Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Sorry this was so late. So I am uploading this midday Tuesday. Trying to get caught up after some writer's block.

This chapter took longer than expected, due to circumstances, and because of that is being posted away from schedule. Expect another chapter this Saturday or Sunday. I do not really know what happened, but I was really unsure of how I was even going to begin writing this chapter.

Oh and I really recommend paying close attention to Toothless's word choices in his snippets. His language evolves rather nicely, don't you agree?

* * *

><p>After being taken "shopping", I had spent the majority of my day trying and failing to find my way back to Hiccup's home. In hindsight, I probably have saved myself the trouble of wandering around for hours, if I had simply asked for directions, but I do not want to admit that I had gotten lost to anyone. Especially not one ofâ€| them. Were they even a them any more since I was also

human?

I could not find my way back to Hiccup's house. Instead, I found myself at a stony cliff face that had these huge doors on it. Only by standing there had I realized that I had completely gone in the wrong direction. Some Squire I am, I cannot even navigate my way in a human settlement.

Fortunately for me, Hiccup, himself, showed up not a moment later and seemingly everyone else in Berk. All over, I could see people gathering into the cave. But for what purpose? Was this some sort of ritual or practice the villagers did? "Hiccup!" I cried out as I went over to him.

"Toothless?" My friend, at this point, took notice of me and so did everybody else. It was not exactly comforting, but I did not care much. Unless they were helpful or I was involved with them, they were unimportant to me. What did it matter to what they thought of me? "Well, at least I get to see a slightly friendlier face," he said as he met the gazes of everyone who was looking at us. Many of the townsfolk decided it would be a good idea to stop staring.

"So, what's happening here?" I asked.

"Dinner," he said flatly. People were coming to a cave for dinner? Granted, I would expect that of my Kin, just, never something I would guess humans would do. Dinner for the most part, seemed appetizing, considering I went the whole day without eating. It seemed Hiccup picked up on that, "Wait, you mean you don't know?" I shook my head. "Then, why are you here?"

"I got sidetracked," I lied. "I saw all of these people coming here and I wondered what was happening."

"So you got lost?" Hiccup asked me, either seeing through my deception or making an incredibly good guess. "You know, you could have just asked for directions."

I drawled, "In hindsight, maybe. Say, how'd you figure it out?"

"You just told me. Well, I had a hunch, but the only way I would know for sure was to get you to tell me." My jaw must have dropped. Hiccup had deceived me. He gave me a grin as we walked us inside. "Besides, Berk is pretty big. Travelers from abroad tend to get lost quite often without a guide."

"You should have warned me." Maybe I should have bought a tour guide from the twins while I was at it. They seemingly had everything imaginable in their little store, why not have someone who knew how to get a lost dragon to a specific household? "I just shook my head, there were better things to worry about. "So, why are people gathering here for dinner?"

Hiccup explained for me as he went up the stairway. "The Great Hall is where some of us eat. Most of us eat at home, but many of us, especially those of us who lack the time or patience to cook, eat here." I nodded, my mouth watered. As we stepped inside, I could feel my mouth watering at the smell that reminded me vaguely of the time I set a boar on fire. Sure enough, I could see several boars, each stuck end to end on a long wooden pole and being suspended over a

fire with a device. Every now and again, the boars would be turned over, warming the meal evenly. For most dragons, our Breath gave us the power to create fire at will. Yet despite having the method, we seldom cooked anything. Me and my Kin kin preferred to eat our catch raw, with the blood still fresh to drink. Really, if we ever took cooked meat, it was because our prey was burned alive when it was caught. Humans for some reason had an obsession with always making sure their food was warm to the point it was practically an art form in of itself.

All around us, I could see humans sitting down around tables and beginning to socialize, loudly. None of them seemed to be eating yet however. Maybe they had to wait for something? So I asked Hiccup, "Then, why isn't anyone eating?"

"Dad has to command them they could eat, first," he told me. "It's just simple Viking tradition. The Chief sets the rules of his Hall, even meal times, so of course people have to wait until they can eat." So it must have like the tradition of the Flight Commanders taking the first bite before any Squires or Knights can grab food. There had to be certain conditions met before food could be distributed.

"It smellsâ€¦ rather nice. You think anyone would mind if Iâ€¦"

"I'm pretty sure they would be more concerned about me," Hiccup said. "Besides, if dad declared you his guest, you should be fine." Hiccup and I seated ourselves at a vacant table at the far edge of the room. As soon as we did that, people from the tables adjacent to us promptly left. I looked at Hiccup with a questioning glance. Was being a partial dragon really that bad? "Well, some things never change, I guess." That just brought up even more questions that would make us both uncomfortable.

"I'm going to pretend that I did not hear thatâ€¦"

Moments later, a man delivered us a basket filled with fruit, the food of many prey animals. Hiccup reached into the basket and procured a shining red fruit of some sort. "Looks like things are about to get started. They're giving us some apples."

"You," -'you' in this case meaning humans- "eat those?" The Kin did not eat fruits, we were only capable all ate meat, particularly fish meat, but there were a few other exceptions, such as wood.

"Well, yeah," he said. "Apples taste quite good. And besides, you did not complain much after you had that eelâ€¦"

"That was different," I protested. "It was no longer poisonous to meâ€¦ so of course I could eat it."

"Excuses, excusesâ€¦" A couple of men delivered more items. Mostly meat and soup, but also a several loaves of bread and what looked to be two wooden mugs filled with a strange liquid of some sort. All of them were rather hesitant about getting anywhere near Hiccup and only stopped by to deliver.

Just then, the talking hurriedly died down. Many of the crowd turned their attention towards what I assumed to be end of the Hall. Hiccup's father was there, standing alongside Snotlout and his

Father. "I thank you all for joining me this night. I know for many of us, the last few days have been rather difficult on both our bodies and our mindsâ€¦ With Alvin as dangerous as he is, we will need to be on our guard and explore new tactics and methods to defeat him." He was obviously referring to a certain some of his. "No matter what happens, we should never forget that we are Vikings," he declared. He raised a mug over his head, it spilled some of that strange amber like liquid onto the floor. "Now, we eat." To that, the assembled men and women raised their own mugs and shouted cries of their own. They all went digging into their food and conversing.

While Hiccup dug into his soup first, I had a bite of the apple. The taste was rather strange, yet appealing. As I had never tasted any fruit before, I had nothing to compare it with. The flesh hard enough to be solid, yet weak enough to beâ€¦ crunchy, like breaking twigs or bones in my jaws. Though it did not smell, the taste was a mix of subdued sweetness and sour. It was difficult to describe. About the only thing I did not like was eating through the center, which I found to be full of seeds and much too tough to eat through.

After I was done with the apple, I moved on to the cooked boar. I had a piece of its thigh with some of it connected to a piece of bone. The taste was rather different than simply flame heated swine. It was altered in some manner, though I could not tell why. The taste was simplyâ€¦ sharper, stronger to have just come from a simple process of heating meat. The meat also practically let go of its own bone.

And then there was the soft, sweet, yet crunchy bread that reminded me faintly of honey. While it was obvious where the apple and the pig meat came from, I did not know where bread came from. It was just something the humans always had. Surely, it cannot have just come from the ground.

Alvin did not offer much of anything, other than smoked meats and fish and maybe a loaf of bread or two, and while the soup I had been offered as soon as I had left Alvin's custody had been better, nothing I had before came so close to the flavor and sensation of human cooking. As soon as I could, I should convince my King to sample some cooking and maybe to start something of a new tradition or lesson plan. For too long have the Kin been deprived of it.

I stopped eating when I noticed Hiccup staring at me. "You know," he said, "I was worried you'd stick out like a sore thumb over here, but reallyâ€¦ You act more like a Viking than I do, sometimes."

I eyed him, confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, for starters, you and everyone else uses their hands," he then raised up the wooden implements in his hands. "While I use silverware. And yes, I am aware they are not made of silver." I grinned in response. "Your hygiene skills and table manners are almost as bad as Snotlout's and you've got something stuck between the gaps where your missing teeth were." That for some reason made me feelâ€¦ rather embarrassed.

Hiccup's father came and approached us, he seemed calmer, more at ease. "There you are," he said to his son. Beside the man was Snotlout, who only just glared at me. There was no way he was going

to let me fulfill my oaths, unless he did something to release me from them.

"Hey dad."

I politely bowed my head. Hopefully humans had an understanding of such niceties or else my opinion of them would go down immediately.

He only sighed. "I'm glad that you did not go off and leave us."

"Because I am such a valued member of the community," Hiccup said dryly.

"Well, you've always fit in more than Mildew," his father stated. "Though that is not exactly saying muchâ€|" This only caused his son to visibly frown at him. Apparently, there was someone who was more of an outcast than Hiccup was.

There was a moment of silence between the two of them, each of them trying to decide how to pick their words. I, being who I was, decided to involve myself. "I hope you two decide to do more than just stand there silently." Both of them turned their attention to me. "Well, you might as well speak up. I'm sure you both have got plenty of things to say to each other."

Both of them then took a deep breath and then said something. Unfortunately, their words tangled each other's, leaving whatever the other said as a meaningless garbled noise.

"Alright, you go first, then."

"No, you should go first."

They said to each other. And I thought I had issues in my family.

"Alright, I'll go first," said Hiccup.

I saw his father nod. Snotlout, stayed silent, looking at us in the back ground. Why he was here, I did not know, but surely, the Chief had a purpose for bringing him here.

"Dad," he said, his voice getting tense. "I know thisâ€| everything I've done has always resulted inâ€| damages and that this time, this is probably the single worst thing I have ever done. I know that I made my biggest mess up when Alvin of all people suddenly became next to impossible to kill. It was my fault that some of us are no longer what we should beâ€|" That was a subtle nudge in my direction. Yes, it was his fault, but I've forgiven himâ€| mostly. I still mourn the loss of my wings.

"But maybeâ€| Maybe I can use thisâ€| curse of mine to help Berk. Maybe I can finally be usefulâ€|" Over the month that I have known of him, I have heard bits and pieces of Hiccup's life before he met me. Mostly, I was just curious as to what gave him the determination to shoot me down despite being the worst Viking on Berk. I was a little surprised to learn that my captor was consider so low in society, despite having a father who decided to fight an abomination with his

fists when his sword got destroyed. "Two weeks from now, I want to become best fighter at the Choosing. I want to show everyone of what I can do now. " I had no idea what that meant, but that implied there was some sort of special event coming up by then.

Snotlout and Hiccup's father had their jaws drop open. Snotlout, who recovered first, responded a moment later after recollecting his thoughts. "As if, I'm going to be the star of that show."

"Please, you won't get past Astrid," Hiccup stated.

"Wait, Astrid's there, too?"

"Yeah told me that she was going to be there, I figure she might have special privileges given what she did instead of taking class, I'm guessing Fishlegs might have them too, but I haven't spoken to him yetâ€¦ Either way, I'm going to prove myself in front of everyone there. Freak or not, I'll fight everyone if I have tooâ€¦"

Those same hands were placed themselves over the partial dragon's shoulders with improbably tenderness. "My son," his father said. "What am I going to do with you?"

"I have to do this, dad."

Stoick sighed. "Just try not to get anyone else changed before the Choosing. The Council is unsure of what to do about that so called potion of yours."

"Wait, I thought it would be easy for them to decide on that," Hiccup stated. "Is there something I should know about."

"Oh, it's nothing, it does not matter right now," the father said. "Right now, we need to focus on getting you two in the best shape of your lives." Hiccup and Snotlout nodded, each of them eying each other intently. "You can walk again it seemsâ€¦so maybe it's a good idea for me to start training you both."

So Hiccup was apparently going to go for some sort of important fight. My Kin had this sort of thing, too, usually it was a dominance challenge or something to settle disputes. The Knighthood in particular enforced the rules of the fighting, usually acting as mediators and witnesses to the fight. This was especially true if one of the combatants was in the Knighthood. The rules tended to vary depending on what the goal of the fight was or who was the host, but it was just one more system of proving honor and gaining glory.

"Maybe I can help," I volunteered. As a Squire, I knew plenty about the combat forms my Kin used, likely more than any of the Herd ever learned. Granted, I would have to make adjustments and make some artistic liberties to translate them into Hiccup's odd transitional form, but in theory it would be doable. The same could be said for Snotlout, if he was willing to accept.

"You? Help?" Snotlout questioned. "No thanks, I think you helped enough." I expected his response.

"Maybe later," said the Chief. "I have some things I would like to do with my son and nephew in private before I get into the moreâ€¦"

difficult training."

"And what would that be?" All of us boys asked. I was, more or less, a boy, like Hiccup, now.

"Hunting, of course," said the man. "Tommorrow morning, we leave for a few days and nights trip to give you two a warm upâ€¦ and to get you two to work together."

Hunting seemed like a relatively good option. My Kin loved to hunt. There was a difference between normal hunting andâ€¦ the Hunt against the Herd. Really, the later are not actual hunts, but rather, it was just tradition to call them that. Wild game was considered a delicacy, with the better the captured prey, the greater the respect gained from it. It was also preferred not to roast the prey on fire until it was time to eat it. Complicating matters further was the fact that trees tend to obscure the prey when viewed from the sky. This all meant that hunt often was conducted on the ground without any use for flight. Some commoners were even granted special privileges because of how adept they were at those actions. Humans were not preferred as they were considerably more dangerous, but it did happen from time to time. Such a practice would of course have to be banned once I informed the King that humans were not simply animals.

I eyed the wooden mug and sniffed at the liquid. It smelled odd and again I lacked something to compare it to. It was getting rather old trying to wrap my head around these new concepts. Deciding that it was safe to drink, I took a mouthful.

My headâ€¦ feltâ€¦ odd. Soft, relaxed, and nauseous. My tongue felt something rather sweet, reminiscent of honey. "What isâ€¦ hicâ€¦ this stuff?" I asked to no one in particular. I got up from my chair.

I just had the strange urging, a longing, to danceâ€¦ be merry, have fun. I drank more of my drink and then took the mug by Hiccup's side. He wouldn't mind.

"Uh, Toothless, are you okay?" said Hiccup. I think it was Hiccup at least. My vision was blurry and I couldn't recognize anyone.

"No, hic, I'm fine," Yet it all felt soâ€¦ relaxing. Another drink wouldn't possibly hurtâ€¦ andâ€¦ then I felt the world falling around me.

* * *

><p>"Ugh, my headâ€¦" Toothless said as he awoke. "Why is my head spinning?" It made sense why he passed out last night. He wasn't exactly used to drinking. On Berk, like most other Vikings, we all started drinking alcohol at a young age. Toothless, having lived as a dragon his whole life, probably never had to deal with alcoholic beverages before.<p>

"It's just a hangover, it'll pass," I assured him. "I should have warned you about the drinks." Maybe Fishlegs would know of the effects of alcohol on dragons, but I doubted he'd know anything about mead's effects on dragons in human bodies. So far, it seemed to be the same as a normal person would suffer after going of his limits.

Toothless grunted in frustration as he got up from my bed. He tried to take a few steps, but it seemed he was still rather dizzy. He toppled back and forth. "Does this always happen when you drink that?"

"Only when you drink out of your depth."

"Why are we back at your house?" Clearly his vision was returning to him.

"Oh that, dad, just carried you home shortly after you passed out." After that, dad and I decided it was best go home and have a nice bed. My father tucked him. I had the feeling that he rather approved of Toothless, which was a plus. I've overheard him speaking with Gobber about making him an extra bed just for him. It would definitely make it easier for me to keep my eye on him. Strange how this all worked out because I decided to use a magical arrows that I still could not understand. If I had downed Toothless without transforming him, my father probably would not have been so approving of him.

Speaking of him, Toothless was looking out the window, looking at the sunlight entering he room . "And it'sâ€¦dawn."

"Well, at least you got your full eight hours of sleep it seems," I replied. "You even missed out on breakfast." Well, technically, breakfast was the first meal of the day. You could have it at night and it could still be called breakfast, if you slept long

Toothless shook his head, most likely to stop it from what must have been a rather uncomfortable situation. Hangovers were a terrible thing to have. "I'm never drinking that stuff again."

"Next time, don't drink the whole thing that quickly."

"Right," he agreed with. "Say, what are you doing?"

By now, he must have noticed I was sitting writing on a table. Usually, it was used for any mealtimes at the house. Every other time was when dad and I were busy writing things. My dad often wrote letters to other Chiefs, mostly to state requests and other political things. In my case, these letters were addressed to the children of these Chiefs, most notably, Camicazi and Thuggory. "Writing letters to some people I trust," I told him. "You've already met Camicazi and one of our neighbors."

"Is it important?" I nodded. "What is it about?"

"Just stuff," I said. "I'm going to need as much help as I can get and I know some these people might be able to lend a helping hand." I had to spend a while explaining to Toothless whys and the hows.

Thuggory had access to the Meathead Public Library, a vast repository of information that was off limits under most circumstances. As son of Chief Mogadon the Meathead, Thuggory could give me books and knowledge about the strange and linguisticsâ€¦ which in Viking terms mostly meant the same thing. Really, I would love to have a Latin to Norse dictionary.

As for Camicazi, she was going to keep an eye out for Alvin for me. I couldn't do it much myself, but I knew the Bog Burglars liked to keep tabs on everyone they could through a network of informants. I could use that kind of knowledge to my advantage. I was also tasking her with testing out a theory of mine. Alvin could not create the potion for some reason. I wanted to know if that same limitation applied to Camicazi and if the arrows had that same special requirement. I have given her the directions, to the best of my memory. I couldn't find that book, so either someone taken it or it was back on Outcast Island.

And all of this was to take place in secret, without any of our parents knowing. I've even made "fake" letters, well, real, but less sensitive information, and I've also arranged for private postal services.

Toothless seemed to understand the seriousness of what I was attempting. "Is there any way I can help?"

"Well, for starters, you can tell me where my book is. I really need it back." That book was the reason I was in this mess to begin with. If I had to have any hope of fixing my problems, I first needed to understand what I was dealing with.

Toothless cringed at the mention of the book. Now that I thought about it, that book was most likely covered in Night Fury scales. The best comparison I could come up with was the time I had seen these books made in human skin back at my grandfather's house when went to pick up his stuff. After all, what other dragons had black scale. "Well, Fishlegs has it."

"Oh, that's great then. See if you can get it back while I am away," I said.

"You're going away?" Toothless questioned.

"That hunting trip dad talked about last night. It's my dad's idea of having a family bonding time." When I was younger, I had very little patience for that sort of thing, deciding it was better to hunt trolls instead. Hopefully, I was mature enough to handle that now that my life might well depend on it.

"Oh, so you're not taking me?" Toothless questioned.

"No." Which was an unfortunate truth. Spending two days with Snotlout was not how I envisioned spending my first few days free from Alvin's grasp, but I suppose the Norns had their own plans for me.

"And what about me?" Toothless asked. "Surely, he doesn't expect me to stay here on my own." It was a violation of the Code of Hospitality. By going on a hunting trip and not inviting him, my father was being a bad host. In some places, you could be put to death for that crime.

"Gobber's willing to take you off my hands till I get back," said my father as he entered the room. Unlike most of the time, where he wore his armor, he decided to abandon it in favor of more furs and an assorted. "He's my most trusted friend, I would not give that job to just anybody. I hope you understand that I need to do

this."

Toothless frowned slightly, but attempted to hide it. "Sure, I guessâ€¦"

"Oh and before I forget." My father handed Toothless a rather large basket, filled to the brim with red articles of clothing and a black furred... coat or something. My friend took a red tunic from the basket. My friend, taking a moment, decided to remove the tunic he had been wearing, one of mine, and put on the new red tunic. It fit perfectly on him.

"It fits," Toothless exclaimed.

"The twins must really want their yak backâ€¦" I pondered aloud. It wasn't until last night, on the way back to my house that I spoke to Ruffnut and Tuffnut again. Apparently they committed a crime in pursuit of making a saleâ€¦ and Toothless was the victim. At the very least, it seemed they were putting effort into their store job after all. The thought of a competent pair of twins seemed very terrifying.

Toothless then tried on the black furred jacket he had been given. It must have come from a wolf or smaller beast. It even came with a hood, to keep his head dry in the rain and sleet that came constantly on Berk. Oddly enough, it reminded me of my own jacket, which Alvin had burned ages ago. I was going to need a new one.

The former dragon gave a smirk as he examined his attire. No doubt he was liking the clothing that he wore.

My father gave a hearty laugh. "You seem to like it," he said.

"It's great, sir. Thank you." Toothless gave a polite bow.

"Good," my father replied. "Come on, son, Snotlout is waiting for us."

"Just a moment dad, I need to send these letters," I said. Hopefully, I would get a reply from Thuggory by the time I returned and a response from Camicazi the day later.

"You're going already?" Toothless asked. I nodded. He only sighed in response.

This was going to be our first time being apart from each other in so long. Both of us wish we could have stayed together longer, maybe come up with a plan or something. But, no, this had to be. When I told dad last night I wanted to be the best warrior at the Choosing, I meant it. Astrid said she thought of me as a fellow warrior now, a stark difference compared to what she and everyone else considered me a month ago.

I had no idea why, though. All I did was just do the cowardly thing and come up with a good plan to run away. Stillâ€¦ if she believed that, maybe I should believe in it too. It was the first time anyone, other than Toothless, who might have been a bit biased, showed any faith in me. I wanted to live up to that belief.

I had to beat Astrid in the ring, that was the only way.

Finishing my letters, I walked out the door. Toothless was obviously frowning at leaving me as I left. "Take care, bud," we both said to each other.

Now that Toothless wore clothingâ€¦ I just noticed in many ways, we were quite similar, yet subtly different in many ways. For starters, we were both born to high ranking people in our society, but while he was the prodigy, I was the failure. We both ended up being changedâ€¦ and well, the differences were obvious. The list goes on and on. It was strange to think that I had more in common with a dragon I did with my own people. At the same time, said dragon had more in common with my people than I did sometimes.

* * *

><p>Hiccup and his father had left an hour ago, leaving me alone. Gobber stopped by a bit latter and decided it would be a good idea to have a little lunch while they were away.<p>

"Soâ€¦ it's just you and me nowâ€¦" sighed Gobber. He reminded me a bit of One Eye, my teacher, though that could have just been his missing limbs.

For a moment, I wondered the purpose of what his wooden hands and legs were for, until the man promptly switched out his hook hand for a mug. It became clear to me that they were there to make up for infirmity. With the exception of Nadders, who only had two legs, my Kin did not value the loss of a single limb as something grave. Losing one leg out of four, was an inconvenience at best. But for humans, who used only two legs, the failure of one must have been far more severe. The same likely applied to their hands.

"So, I guess I now am officially discharged from my teaching duties, I'll be heading back to my forge." Oh, that's right. He was Hiccup's mentor who taught him blacksmithing. "Unfortunately, my apprentice is going to be busy for a whileâ€¦" He grinned slightly. "Now, he told me, you know a thing or two about smithing, you want a job?"

The thought seemed appealing. I liked being able to shape steel into forms I desired and the chance to learn further was something I couldn't pass up. There was one problem. "But what about Hiccup?" I did not want to take what was rightfully his away from him.

"Oh, well, there's no rule saying you can't have more than one apprentice," he commented. I felt rather silly having just realized that. "Besides, his father won't let him touch the forge until after he trained himself constantly. Not exactly the best position for an apprenticeship." I nodded. Gobber then took a swig of his mead and wiped the liquid off of his face. Why people drank that stuff, I will never understand.

I supposed that if Hiccup wasn't going to be harmed by my acceptance, it should be fine. Actually, waitâ€¦ that gave me an idea. "Alright, I'll accept." I took a bite out of my apple. I have decided I liked fruits.

"Great," Gobber replied. "Your first task then is to fetch me more ale."

I raised my eye brows. "What?" I responded. Not only was I confused by the nature of the suggestion, I did not know what ale was. Was it like ships and boats being the same thing, but with different words being used?

"I need to see if you'll listen to my directions." He pointed me to a set of barrels at the far side of the room. "Now, just take one of those kegs over here and you should be good."

I only nodded as I headed in to the direction he prescribed. Yes, my comparing him to One Eye was spot on. My own tutor decided the best course of action for my first day as a Squire was to have myself and the other trainees try to fetch him a fish. A very specific fishâ€¦ We called such tasks "fetch quests", because all we had to do was fetch our teacher something he wanted, specifically. Now while I knew the purpose of such things, that did not make them any easier to bear.

I found a barrel on its side and held over a table with a valve on its base. I only knew what it was because I helped make that pump Hiccup created for the Zippleback gas. It was fortunate I knew what to do. Placing the mug underneath the tap, I twisted the valve and released some of this mead into the

"Dragon!" someone shouted behind. I jumped out of the way, fearing the worst. Had my Kin decided to come rescue me, at a time when that would have been really bad? I fell to the floor, spilling the contents of Gobber's mug onto the ground. I turned and looked at who shouted. It was an old man, his hair grayed from the passage of time. His old, shriveled up finger was pointed right at me. I knew what the gesture meant. "Dr-dragon!" he stuttered.

Somehow, this man knew I was a dragon and now he was letting the whole of Berk know my secret. That would mean certain death if anyone believed him. How could he have known? "No, I'm not a dragon," I protested. I was not lying, I really was not a dragonâ€¦ anymore. "Can't you see? I'm a boy." A seemingly ordinary human boyâ€¦

The man approached me, his feet were wobbling, his motions dizzied. He must have been really old to have been so frail seeming. Hopefully, he had a reputation for being senile. "You-You're not a boyâ€¦" said the old man. "You're just pre-pretendingâ€¦" So he knew. I was done for.

"You'reâ€¦ just like my wifeâ€¦ pretending to beâ€¦ what ye' ain'tâ€¦" I blinked at that. Just what exactly was he talking about? "Just like all the othersâ€¦ "

"Uh, what?" I asked.

Just then the man, fell over on his knees and began vomiting half digested foodstuffs. He was sick. I began to grow concerned and approached him cautiously. He only needed to glare at me once.

"Quit scaring the boy, Mildew," said Gobber as he approached. Apparently this little scene had been noticed by everyone in the Hall. Hopefully, they didn't believe a word this Mildew said. Now where did I remember hearing that name before? It feels somewhat familiar. "I know you're upset about Hiccup, but you don't need to take it out on some innocent bystandersâ€¦" Even though that all the

accusations levied were technically true.

"That boy," Mildew looked up at Gobber, it did not seem like he acknowledged my existence at all, something to be thankful for. "Is just a traitor to his own kind waiting to happen. He'll sell us out, just you wait." I offered the old man, a hand up, but he turned me down by pushing me away. The old man, clutching his chest limped out of the door way.

"What was that all about?" I asked Gobber.

"Oh that, Mildew tends to drink quite a bit when things don't go his way. You get used to it after a while," Gobber explained. Apparently this happened quite often given how he spoke. "Once he downs the fifteenth cupful, he starts seeing things and going all loopy. Must have thought you to be Hiccup."

"So you don't believe a word he said?" It helped to make sure.

"No, any man that drunk shouldn't be listened to, especially not that man." I gave a sigh of relief. I wasn't going to get killed after all. "Besides, who could ever believe you were a dragon?" As he said that, men and women through the hall gave chortles and snorts of laughed. Even I laughed a little, but for a different reason. Yeah, sometimes, I have a hard time believing I was ever a dragon.

"I'd believe he'd be a Night Fury," said another voice. I saw Fishlegs approaching me.

"Fishlegs!" I said as went over to him. Finally, I had someone who was 'in the know', especially someone who tended to know quite about my own Kin. "What brings you here?"

"Lunch of course," he said. "They serve a mean broiled yak soup today." I agreed. Human food was quite appetizing, especially since there was a wide variety of flavors to choose from. I might been blind to the world of scent and deaf to sound, but humans definitely had better taste in food. "And well, I heard Mildew and came to look. I wanted to know if you were alright." He knew the truth about me, so his concern was appreciated. Honestly, why did I have such an easy time making friends among humans? Granted, I also seemed to have had a much easier time making enemies.

"I'm fine." Now he was here. I came up with a thought. "Hey, uh, there's some stuff I want to talk to you about." Stuff about Hiccup's book, the one made with Night Fury scales.

"Uh, okay," Fishlegs replied.

I glanced over to Hiccup's mentor. "Mind if I?"

"Oh, sure, go ahead. Come by my shop after you're done, we can talk about your apprenticeship then." Gobber replied as he stepped away. "Just remember to ask for directions." I cringed. I did not want to relive getting so lost ever again, especially since it happened just yesterday.

I took him to an empty corner of the Hall, some place where not many people seemed to traverse. Hopefully, everyone would be too loud or self absorbed to pay attention to what I had to say. "It's about the

book, isn't it?" Fishlegs wasn't guessing.

"Yeah, Hiccup wants me to get it back for him." I was vague enough to imply that it wasn't mystical about it if anyone over heard.

"Uh sure," replied Fishlegs. "I don't have it on me right now, but I can give it to you later." I nodded. That was easy enough.

"Good," I said. "Say Fishlegs, can you do me a favor?"

"Uh sure, what do you need?" his tone was rather hesitant.

"Can you teach me to read Norse? There's a certain book I want to read."

* * *

><p>Hours and hours of hiking through forest with a backpack half your body weight is not a pleasant experience. Even less pleasant is doing all of that without any shoes. Mind you, though my new feet made it impossible to wear normal footwear, I did not necessarily need shoes when my feet had such a thick coating of scales. No, what made it unpleasant was what I was stepping in. I had always thought getting mud stuck on your boots was annoying. Getting that same mud stuck on your feet was annoying and gross. And that was only if mud was involved. I should have asked for a shoemaker to make me customized shoes before we left.<p>

I tried to keep my pace, but my legs were still something I was getting used to. I always fell slightly behind, but this was possibly better than I would have been before. Back then, I couldn't even lift and axe right.

I was just glad Snotlout wasn't giving me glares along the way.

By midday, we've set up a base camp, several hours away from home. It was by a cave, somewhere close to the base of Berk's mountain. It consisted of a simple tent. From here, we would be launching our little expeditions into the wild and sleeping the night away. Only two days of this and I would be back home, awaiting what other ideas my dad had.

"Alright, boys," my dad said, gaining the attention of Snotlout and I. "Do you know why you're here?"

"To hunt," Snotlout and I stated. As if the answer couldn't have been more obvious.

"No," my father stated. I blinked. If we weren't here to hunt, then what were we here for? "You two are here to learn to work together."

"Dad, are you sure this is a good idea?" I asked. I didn't neccisarilly like Snotlout much, nor did I despise him as much as when we were kids, but I still didn't like the idea of me having to rely on him. For all I know, he could get us stranded on an island in the middle of enemy territory with no way back home.

"Yeah, I can't believe I'm with Hiccup, on this." I shared his sentiments. I couldn't believe we agreed on anything. "That's just

crazy."

"You two are going to be fighting side by side in two weeks time, you best better get used to working as a team until then."

"Dad, do you really expect us to just suddenly become _friends _after, I don't know, not seeing eye to eye for the better part of our lives?" And Snotlout did start this little _war_ of ours back when we were five.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I do."

"Eh, what?" Snotlout replied.

"A little blood loss and bloodshed makes for a great way to make new friends. I mean, I've met Gobber after she insulted Val way back when and look at us now. We're best friends," And I met Toothless and became friends with him after trying to murder him for his whole life.

"And it's also is a great way to make new enemies," I interjected.

Snotlout added in, "Besides, I'm not working with a freak like him." Technically, he was now a freak like me, granted, he'd need to take a beating before we started to look close. I still wasn't sure what he was turning into. I was guessing Monstrous Nightmare, but the only way to be sure was to see it for myself.. The gods must had a sense of irony for turning me into a Night Fury. As the troll king, Loki probably was to blame.

"You are," my father stated in that firm voice of authority. I did not think either of us were strong enough to defy my father, even if we did work together. We backed away. My father smiled at that. "Good. Now, we will begin hunting," He handed us our weapons, some spears and a bow.

I did not need much instruction. I knew my way around a spear. Spears were at least light enough that I could actually use them when I was a weakling. Granted, I wasn't all that good with them either. Especially since my throwing skills were quite terrible.

As for bows, I was adequate at them. If by adequate, I meant that I still used a child's training bow, yes, I was very adequate. knew many Vikings who derided bows and crossbows as weapons for the weak. While that might be true for crossbows, that cannot be said about traditional bows. They were weapons that required a lot of strength and coordination to use to their full extent, things which I lacked. The reason I stuck to crossbows was because I could not handle the force needed to actually pull back the drawstring. Of course, that was then Now, well, I could at least pull back the string. As for shooting it the right place well, dad is going to have to get a new tent next time he wants to get us going camping

My tracking skills were also not something I had much practice in. I've been trying to find trolls since I was a kid. Maybe that's why Loki has an interest in me. But I knew the reason I kept failing was because I lacked the skill or ability to do so.

Still, my father led us boys on a little hunt, cautiously following

nearly unseen trails that I could only imagine. My father was a great hunter. Every fur in our house was something he picked up on the trail. Snotlout and I made a silent agreement to do his wishes, if only so that we could go home faster. Neither of us wanted to be here, with each other, even though we both wanted victory at the Choosing. I have no idea what my father expected us to do.

Possibly, hours later. My father went close to the ground and hid in some bushes. He gave me a gesture to stop, alerting me that something was nearby. We all saw a herd of deer up ahead. He pointed at one of them, a doe which looked rather old and weak. "We take that one," he whispered. "Now go."

Snotlout and I slowly crept around closer, our bows drawn. Our plan of attack was simple. Me and my cousin were to be the ones doing the actual hunting with my father watching us. To that end, father instructed us to advance silently and strike down our target with coordinated effort. Two attacks at the same time had a higher chance of being fatal than a single attack, after all. Simple exercise.

Our target did not notice us as we crept closer. Once we were in practically spitting distance of the herd, we pulled back notched our arrows. I looked at Snotlout, tense. Both of us just wanted to get this over with.

I held my breath. Threeâ€¦ Twoâ€¦ Oneâ€¦

Snotlout and I loosed our arrows simultaneously. Both of them glided through the air at a quick pace, each hitting a mark on the creature's body: for Snotlout, I was the chest, while I struck a blow on the hindquarters. It jerked in surprise and tried to run away, but the force of the two blows and the pain of them in its body forced it to the ground. The herd panicked and fled in scattered directions. All of them wanted to leave.

We let them. We did not need them. It only took a minute for them to leave. Neither of us wanted to get run over by panicked beasts, even though it was likely we could survive itâ€¦ especially since wellâ€¦ scale growth.

My father was the first to approach the fallen doe. It was still alive, still moving, still breathing. Those signs of life faded slowly before completely ceasing. This was the first time I had actuallyâ€¦ killed something. Watching things slowly bleed to death is not something new to me. I was Viking, well, the son of a Viking, I saw that sort of thing often whenever there was a dragon raid on my hometown. I've seen many dragons and men die that way. I also witnessed this sort of thing whenever I visited any of the farms at the edge of town. Animals were constantly being killed in a similar manner whenever someone needed food. I grew up seeing things die constantly. It was just a fact of life.

But this was the first time I had killed. Even on Outcast Island, I had only managed to defend myself from attackers. It reminded me that this could have been the second, if I had not hesitated at the last moment. Toothless could have been in that position. I had to remind myself that I was not seeing Toothless dying in front of me.

A deer was not like a dragon or a boy. At least, or so I thought. I don't know what I would do if I found out deer had their own society

or culture. Next thing you know, cats, dogs, and mice would be signing petitions and forming governments.

"Good job, boys!" my father congratulated me.

"_I_ killed it," cheered Snotlout, emphasis his.

"You both did," corrected my father. "While striking its chest would have made it bleed out eventually, Hiccup saved you the trouble of having to chase after it while it slowly died."

"Whatever," said Snotlout. "So, what now?"

"We carry it back to camp and we eat, of course," said my father. He drew forth a long wooden pole and some rope. This step, I was familiar with. We bound up the deer's legs to the pole. This was to make it easy to carry the deer back. Even the strongest men have a hard time hauling a deer around, so we humans made special tools to make it easier on us. With the deer fasted to the pole, Snotlout and I would have an easier time carrying it, since its weight was being distributed in two different places.

With the deer and tow, we made the trek back to camp.

Unfortunately, it seemed camp was looking worse for wear. The camp site was ravaged, something had been through here. The tent my father pitched up was in shambles (okay, worse shambles than before), the bags that held our things had their contents scattered on the floor. What could have done this?

Snotlout and I hastily dropped the deer carcass on the ground and drew our weapons. Rule of thumb, you get your camp raided, always assume whatever did it was likely still there.

Father did not so much as blink before his sword was already in hand. "Steady, boys," my father said as he approached the site where our tent had been. "No scorch marks, excluding what we already had, so it can't be a dragon." Unless said dragons were clever or smart enough to figure out how to disguise themselves. Really, knowing dragons were smarter than you took them for brought up many interesting questions. All the same, I hope none of Toothless's allies were involved in this.

Dad picked up the remains of a backpack and rummage through it. "Hm, whatever did thisâ€¦ must not have cared for anything except for what it wanted."

"Which would be?" I asked.

"Food, that salted jerky is all gone," my father said.

"Someone ate my jerky!" Snotlout complained. It was his idea to bring it along. "Aw man, whoever did this was going to pay."

"So what did this, dad?"

My father sighed. "It cannot have been a wolves, they don't cause nearly this much destruction. It cannot have been dragons because there was no fire, so that leaves only one optionâ€¦ A bear."

"Uh, right, he could have jerky if he really wanted itâ€|" Said Snotlout. Yikes. Bears were bad news. For starters, they were big and weighed somewhere over a few hundred pounds. On top of that, most of that weight was tough muscle, giving it proportionate strength and toughness. Bears also had thick hides that protected them from harm from many weapons as effectively as it protected them from the winter. My arrows and my spear might as well have been made of paper if we were fighting a bear. It comes as no surprise that downing a bear is second only to downing dragons in some circles.

Just then we hear a roar. We turned our attention to the mouth of the cave we camped by. Sure enough, we found the expected brown furred creature lumbering towards us. I stated, "In retrospect, we should have made sure that cave was deserted."

It must have been quite angry. The beast charged forward at us, gaining momentum. My father and I quickly jumped out of the way, neither of us felt we were tough enough to fight a rampaging bear directly. Snotlout however did not. Whether it was by some fear or insanity, my cousin stood his ground.

He paid for it by getting knocked into a nearby tree. "Snotlout!" I cried. I might not have liked my cousin all that much, but can I be blamed for showing at least some compassion? I loosed two arrows in quick succession. This only served to tick off the bear even more. The bear then lunged forth at me, its claws raking.

I tried to move out, but I was too slow. "Get out of the way, Hiccup!" my father stated. He pulled me away just in time to escape the full force of the bear's attack.

Unfortunately, I still got hit. My left arm, my accursed primary got a nasty scratch. I winced in pain. I dropped my bow as I used my right hand to clutch my arm. It bled a little, but it would heal. Unfortunately. Already the blood was starting to dry up and harden. I just hope I could still use my arm like a normal person.

I wanted to run, I wanted to panic, I wanted to scream. We were fighting a bear after all and it seemed rather insistent on killing us. While I was sure my dad could defeat it, the question was, would Snotlout or I survive to see it?

I went over to Snotlout, who other than having his back slammed against a tree and knocked unconscious, he seemed fine. I tried to shake him awake. "Snotlout, wake up!"

His eyes started to stir awake. "What happened?" he moaned as he stood up.

"You got run over by a bear!" I coughed. I saw my father, keeping the bear at bay with a sword. He was mostly on the defense, using his blade to deter the beast from attacking. "Snotlout, we have to get going!" As I carried my cousin to his feet, Snotlout however, seemed entranced by the whole scene before him.

Just then, my father lost the grip of his sword. Maybe it was an off day or something or maybe the fatigue of hiking for several hours gotten to him. Alternatively, the bear was just that good. Maybe a Valkyrie decided that my father should go to Odin's Hall early. It did not matter why, but suddenly, my father lost the grip on his

sword just enough that the bear managed to knock it away several away from him and sent my father to the ground. "Father!" "Uncle!" Snotlout and I cried.

My father cautiously backed away from the slowly approaching bear. He wasn't afraid to die. He was a Viking after all. His honor was intact and his skill was without question. Odin would welcome him with open arms. No, he still had to resist to the bitter end. My father was simply too stubborn to just want to die when he was still alive.

Snotlout leapt up on the bear's back before the creature could lay another claw on my father. The beast tried to hurl him away, but Snotlout's grip around the bear's neck proved to be quite strong. In response, my cousin repeatedly pounded the bear's skull with his hands. He lacked a dagger, but evidently, he felt his hands were good enough.

I rushed towards my father's sword, making my decision. I picked it up and sliced at the bear's kneecaps, causing it to reel and stumble in pain. No matter how big and strong a bear was, it still was made of flesh and blood. Flesh and blood could not resist steel forever. Snotlout leapt off the bear's back just before it hit the ground in a cloud of dust and dirt.

"Boys!" My father cried.

"We're alright," I said.

"Did you see that?" cheer Snotlout. "We took down a bear!"

"Be careful boys," my father said as I handed him his sword. "It could still be alive!"

"Dad, I don't think it's going to trouble us anymoreâ€|" I said as I approached the bear.

"Why not?" my father questioned.

"Look at its headâ€|" muttered Snotlout, finally noticing what was on his hands. The bear's skull lookedâ€| like it was smashed by a cudgel, broken and bloodied in places. Except Snotlout did not have a cudgel with himâ€|

Despite slowly turning me into a dragon, I have known that the potion did indeed make someone stronger. In my case, I was a weakling and I found myself strong as say the average Viking, a huge improvement in my opinion. But I forgot to wonder, what about an already strong Viking, how strong would someone like Snotlout get? The answer, I could see.

The bear did not get up or even breathe. Snotlout was speechless. My father could only stand there gawking for a second. I was just realizing the potential of what I had learned. It wasn't every day you seen a young teenage boy bear a bear to deathâ€| barehanded.

The silence was broken when Snotlout made a suggestion, "Uh mind if I keep it?" He was referring to the bear's carcass. "Dad might want to see thisâ€|"

"Uh, sure," my father replied.

"It's official," I admitted. "Snotlout, you were awesome back there." I had to give my cousin credit, potion enhanced strength or not, leaping up on a bear's back and killing it barehanded is quite a feat. I might as well acknowledge it.

"Uh, thanks, Hiccup!" Those were words neither of us ever thought we would ever hear from that mouth. "You're kinda' were, too."

My father just laughed at the scene. It was we realized that we just confirmed his belief even further. "See, what did I tell you? A little bloodloss and bloodshed makes for great friends."

Now that the danger was over, I stared at my left arm. It had become completely covered in black scales and the hand had warped to become slightly rounder, almost paw like. This little, though dangerous skirmish cost me an arm. I shuddered to imagine what kind of changes I would experience after facing my supposed peers.

Snotlout too had changed a little, some scale had started spreading from to around his neck and hands had started to grow some claws, minor things that might have been better for digging than they were for killing.

My and I exchanged glances of frustration before erupting into a belly laugh. Okay, so maybe taking that potion wasn't completely without its benefits.

* * *

><p>I've definitely got something planned for Mildew. Though, some of you who understand some mythology or folklore might have a leg up on what he was actually referring to. You'll have to read later chapters to find out for sure.

Many of us people who live in the First World have not had experience with livestock and with killing. Hiccup, living in an era where rural life is common and said life had constant fighting, would have witnessed death repeatedly throughout his life. That's also not factoring other things like infant mortality, rampant disease, ect. I called attention to this fact, though it isn't much.

Oh and don't worry, that part about deer, mice, dogs, and cats being intelligent is a bit of a joke /reference to a specific trope, AKA "Mouse World", where animals have their own separate society from humans. Typically, this is done with mice, hence the name. If you're familiar with the Secret of NIMH and an American Tail, you're familiar with this trope. Please do not take the reference seriously at all. It's meant to poke fun at the fact said trope was a heavy influence in me deciding to make the dragons form a functioning society.

To make up for Snotlout not participating at the Battle of Outcast Island, I have given him something to make up for it.

11. Chapter 11

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train

Your Dragon franchise. **

I'm actually so anxious about the coming chapters, I have a hard time thinking of writing on the recent ones. It's a pain. I'm actually late yet again, though in better condition than last time. Soâ€| it seems I'll be posting on Tuesdays instead of Saturdays if I keep my pace like thisâ€| Still, I'll try to post a chapter every week.

* * *

><p>Three days have passed ever since we encountered that bear, with tonight being our last out camping. I sat at the mouth of a cave, staring at the fire and recounting the successes of our voyage. My son was casually chopping firewood, a task previously impossible for him, now was something he relished in. Once he was done, he tossed the logs into our fire. My nephew digging through the piles of furs and animal carcasses we have gathered over the past few days. I knew that look in his eyes; he had dreams, plans, aspirations for that pelt, his greatest accomplishment in his life so far. I should know, I had that look, too. Other than the injuries and subsequent changes brought on by that fight with the bear, neither of them experienced anything else. Overall, I was content with the results.<p>

So, even with the majority of our camping supplies and tent destroyed, I still believed that we could still manage .We were Vikings after all. That meant when we set our minds to a task, we set about doing it, no matter what got in our way. That did not mean that would be stupid about it however. We might have had stubbornness issues, but that did not mean we, Vikings, were pragmatic when they needed to be. My son and nephew should learn have to face adversity whole heartedly. Besides, I've spent my whole life exploring every nook and cranny on Berk, I've faced worse and come out unscathed on more occasions than I could count.

The bear may have destroyed our campsite, eaten our food, and ruined most of our supplies and equipment, but in the end we took its lifeâ€| and its cave as compensation. The bear's former home did not seem to have any other residents, apart from some bats. While it was not the best place to sleep in, it was still better than sleeping out in the open. Especially on the second dayâ€| I couldn't tell if it was raining or hailing that day.

I had skinned bear's carcass as soon as we commandeered its cave. Bear meat wasn't exactly something I had much of in my life, but it was such a crime to let it all go to waste. It was fitting after all, it laid waste to our belonging because of food, now it served only to be served. So between the deer and bear we had slain on the first day, our nutritional needs were mostly met.

Snotlout, at my son's suggestion, was going to keep its pelt for his own personal use. While, admittedly I wanted my son to keep the pelt for himself, my nephew did score the kill. I could only imagine what intended to do with it. Perhaps a cape, symbolizing his power, or maybe a dress, as dowry to a future bride. Bear pelts were valuable after all, only the greatest of hunters got those. And Snotlot got his with his bare hands.

My nephew, brandished his spear over the fire, several ribs were impaled on it. He licked his lips, a deep hunger on his face. I did

the same, myself.

Hiccup on the other hand waved an arrow over the fire, a small, barren bird on its tip. I was fairly sure that arrow was the reason that bird died. I was slightly disappointed, some things rarely changed it seemed.

Snotlout upon seeing this, slapped my son's hands, knocking the bird-on-an-arrow out of his hands. That I expected. What I did not expect was Snotlout's follow up. He gave my son his spear, holding his ribs. "Do it like this, you dolt!" my nephew said. His action might have been well meaning, from a certain point of view.

"Thanksâ€¦" my son said with a frown. He clearly did not want to have his food of choice. Snotlout it seemed was unphased or otherwise did not notice.

"Soâ€¦ tonight's our last night camping, boys," I remind them. "We'll be heading out at dawn, as always."

"Finally!" cheered Snotlout.

"Oh good," said my son. "I was wondering when I would finally be allowed to batheâ€¦"

While the two of them enjoyed this little trip more than they expected, it was clear that they would have preferred to be home. "Relax, boys, I know you're both really excited to go homeâ€¦" I wanted to say something, but Snotlout interrupted me.

"Oh I can't wait to go home and show everyone this little beauty." He gently caressed the bear pelt, promising things to the object. "Say, what you think I should go for?" He asked no one in particular.

"Could go for a capeâ€¦ or a wedding outfit if you felt like it," I suggested off hand, knowing perfectly well what thoughts would come from them.. It might have been wrong of me, but he was my nephew.

"A wedding outfit!" Snotlout latched on to that suggestion like a moth to the flame. It was obvious as to why he went for that one. "Oh Astrid's going to love a bear skin dress."

My son, I saw, gave a faint blush. It wasn't hard to guess he had an interest in a particular someone what with saving his earnings for axe polish every Snoggletog. I would lying if I said I did not take some guilty pleasure in making my son squirm, making him feel slightly uncomfortable. That and it was a way to get back at him for some of the various frustrations I've had to endure back when he was much youngerâ€¦ It was only when I was much older when I began to understand why my parents teased me about Val back before we got serious.

"Uh, Snotloutâ€¦" my son started to say. "When was the last time any of us seen Astrid wear anything resembling a formal dress?"

Snotlout seemed to depress slightly upon realizing that, yes, that Hofferson girl wore little else that was not suited for either combat or utilitarian needs. "Wellâ€¦ maybe, I guess I can give her first

one thenâ€¦ if she doesn't have anyâ€¦"

"I dunno, I'd go for the cape or somethingâ€¦ maybe a rug or a bed spread," said my son. Clearly, he wasn't trying to get the conversation away from Astrid for his own sake. Clearly.

"So, what about a wall mount?" asked my nephew.

"You damaged the head too much, Snot. Not enough fur there to make the head completeâ€¦" Well, that was mostly because my nephew crushed the bear's skull in several places. Honestlyâ€¦ that was something I would have suspected a mere boy from doing. I knew people say I killed dragons when I was a babe, but most of that does tend to be exaggeration.

"Oh, rightâ€¦ Wait, I got it!" my cousin shared. "Can you make me an outfit?"

"Outfit?" asked my son.

"Yeah, an outfit!" yelled my nephew. "Bearskin battle garb. You know, something just screams, no roars, ferocity." What Snotlout was suggesting wasn't uncommon, some Vikings, even some of my neighbors wore bearskins into battle. There were even stories of a special class of warrior who believed in wearing those skins to channel some of the power of the creature they had slain into themselves. Those were called Berzarks. And there were stories that sometimes, they actually became what they tried to emulate. â€¦ Hopefully for Snotlout's sake, that wasn't true. He was already becoming part dragon. Becoming part dragon _and bear_, just might have been pushing it. "You know, something that I could wear at the Choosing."

At that point, I interrupted my nephew, since he had brought up that topic. "Uh, Snotlout, Hiccup will be too busy to help you with that."

"With what?" a said my nephew.

"We're both fighting at the Choosing, remember?" said my son. Leave it to Snotlout to forgot what the whole point of this trip was. "I don't think either of us will have much spare time... You might want to consider asking Toothlessâ€¦"

"Him?" Snotlout snorted. "No way! He's the reason thatâ€¦"

"The reason that you're enjoying crushing rocks every noon," I stated, much to Snotlout's displeasure. Honestly, while I understood why my nephew and my brother saw reason to be upset at the boy when Snotlout had first transformed, that changed when he started to take pleasure in his new found strength. I just shuddered to think what he would decide to do with it while he was in townâ€¦ hopefully not toss some yaks. Thoughâ€¦ sheep toss was fine.

Even my son saw there were some benefits to his new state. All I had to do was convince myself that it was worth getting a few scalesâ€¦ Surely, the fact that your son is finally reaching some of your high set expectations was worth something so trivial as the loss of humanity? Now he could lift a sword and use a bow. It shouldn't be all bad, right? I still tried to pretend that his eye was normal every time I got a look of his face.

"Okay, fine, maybe I'll check out what he can doâ€¦" said my nephew, slightly defeated, but still unmoved. I had not seen much of Toothless, since I invited him over, but he seemed to be a rather well behaved boy. He was practically a model Viking youth for all I have seen of him. It only took a glance I could tell he was strong, honorable, and, as a bonus, seemed to be rather intelligent. He even had a small, but developing name for himself as a peacemaker and as a competent warrior. Thoughâ€¦ I am wondering on why he was so estranged from his parents. For all I know, there could be some very dire political implications around him.

"Boys," I said, bringing myself back into the center of attention. As amusing as it was for the two of them to go ramble on and on, I had to set my foot down. "Remember you both of you will be competing, _together_," I added with emphasis.

"Oh right!" Said Snotlout, I imagine he finally remembered the whole point of this trip. "That's going to be fun! Can't wait to beat up the competitionâ€¦"

"I still think two on six is rather unfair," muttered my son, clearly hesitant on fighting outnumbered over a better trained enemy. Maybe I should have given him better swordsmanship lessons or hired a private tutor, but I honestly never expected he would ever be involved fighting the best of the best over _anything_, let alone the Choosing of all things.

"You're right!" agreed Snotlout, though it seemed reason why he agreed was different considering how positive his outlook is being. "It should be two on ten just to make it even. I'll take seven and you can handle the three."

I just laughed. Hopefully his strength would not go so deeply into the boy's head that he forgets that he's even fighting. Plusâ€¦ the only reason why this whole thing was so imbalanced was a test to see if Hiccup's little potion really did make our warriors even stronger. That plusâ€¦ well, having the ability to recover from seemingly any wounds near instantly was a ridiculously unfair advantageâ€¦ In fact, if it weren't for the side effects, my son's potion could have easily made him the most important man in the known world. Everyone would want it, even me.

"Well, last I checked, I was doing better than you were. Five kills by myself to your three," Hiccup muttered out of hand. "Soâ€¦ assuming they do raise the number of fighters to ten, I would be the one taking the seven while you got the three."

Snotlout seemed to take the challenge in stride and counted with a rebutal of his own. "As if _number_ of kills matters. Last I checked, I killed a bear barehanded!"

Before the conversation could devolve any further into an endless show of one-upmanship, I intervened. "Boys, remember both of you have to work together. That means you have to divide the work _evenly_, so three for both of you." Both of them gave an audible groan of discontentment. They were capable of at least working together now, but they were making this into a sort of competition. My son, while he did not like the fact he was in a competition, was still willing to try and do slightly better than Snotlout.

A moment of silence dawned as neither of the two boys felt like talking any further. Suddenly my son, decided to break his silence. "Okay, so if it's three each, I have a question."

"Go on, my son." The words were a bit harder to speak than normal, but it has gotten easier now that I spent some time with him. Sometimes, I wonder, what if he was no longer able to be my son? What if he changed so much that he was no longer him? His body aside, he was still himself, for now. But what guarantee I had that would always be the case? Would he become just another animal like all dragons were, too simple to understand basic concepts like boats or blacksmithing? Sure, Night Furies were the smartest dragons, but did any of them know how to use a hammer or wield a crossbow? Would he even have a chance to go to Valhalla on his own merits when he fell in battle? Would he even remember me? Odin forbid if I have ever have to slay my son if he became just another dragon. He's all I had left.

My son's question was short and simple, but carried with it some rather unfortunate implications, for him. "Well, if we're fighting three each, who gets Astrid?" I think I saw Snotlout's face pale a little.

* * *

><p>An axe was a simple weapon. Little more than pieces of shaped metal on a stick of axes are far easier to make than a sword. to make and easy to wield. They deliver the force of their blows to a single, specific point for maximum damage. This made them incredibly powerful, but as a cost, could only be used to chop. This ability is what allowed a good woodcutting axe to cut through wood. If other weapons were capable of doing it, we would be using swords to cut wood. Axes could be used as tools and as weapons to great effect, though specialization had to apply.<p>

But for all of that power and usefulness, an axe was still just an object made of steel that can rust and bend under the right conditions. I attached the remains of my axe to a wooden plaque, using strips of leather to hold it in place. The wooden panel was lined with gold and silver, a masterpiece of woodwork; Hiccup wasn't the only person on Berk known for good craftsmanship. Buying it might have cost me the ability to purchase a decent replacement for at least a few more weeks, but I could settle for cheap, hand-me-downs a while longer.

My mother and father stood silently as I carried out my actions, each making silent prayers to Odin, hoping that a message could be sent to the axe's owner. I may not have been able to wield the axe my Uncle had given me, but I still wanted to keep it as a reminder of why I continued to fight. And what better place to keep that reminder than at the heart of our home? I lifted the plaque, axe in tow. Gently, I placed it over by the fireplace, beside the helmet of my ancestor, the Founder of the Hofferson clan many, many years ago.

I felt slightly wet around my face. Was I crying? No, I couldn't be. A hardened warrior like me shouldn't be allowed to cry. It must have been sand in my eyes. Yes, I might have destroyed the last gift I had from my long dead uncle after having it stolen, but that did not mean I would be shedding a tear. I wiped the sweat from my eyes.

I must have been too close to the fire that I was starting to sweat.

The next time I saw Alvin, I was going to rip out his heart and offer it to Odin. It was my axe and the only reason why I no longer could wield it was because of him. Not only had he had the gall to claim my axe as his own when I first met him, he also shattered my own when I was ready and able to fight him. Except now, Alvin was too fast, too strong for me alone to take down. There was no way I was able to fight him in open combat and come out victorious without either a plan or some assistance. Thankful, I knew someone who could provide thatâ€¦ it would certainly be better than axe polish for Snoggletog this yearâ€¦

I turned and faced my parents, their expressions emotionally drained. We've already had our little reunion a few days ago. While I did not leave Outcast Island unscathed, I was at least home. Mother made several offerings to the gods for my safe return and father had been giving me all of my favorite foods on the day of my return. Overall, I was happy to see my family once again.

And then, we learned about what happened to Hiccup. My father did not have a high value of the Chief's son; no one did, except Gobber and a few others, so that was more or lessâ€¦ normal. He did not take the news that Hiccup, Snotlout, and, even worse, Alvin were partially dragon monstrosities very well. Especially since well, it seemed like the whole world was starting to go mad a little at a time. I certainly thought it was when I had seen the boy. By that I mean, I lost another axe today. A cheap one, maybe, but only half of an axe grew on trees. Mother's was slightly better, instead focusing to do the household choresâ€¦ All of them, repeatedly. Which is odd because, normally, everyone in the household shared the chores. She really did not want to believe what was happening around her.

Alongside my parents, we stood silently, contemplating and remembering the good times with my Uncle. I was barely the age of four when he may have passed away, but I still held what little memories I had close to my heart. In fact, most of what I knew about him came from the stories my father would tell of him, fond memories of when they were just boys. Sometimes, I felt like I knew him pretty well through those stories, especially when I was a child. Now that I was older, I wish that I had gotten to spend more time with the real thing just a little bit more. It felt good to remember Fearless Finn, even if it was technically just an axe he once held.

Suddenly, there was a knocking on the door. My father turned and open it. There, outside of the threshold, was someone I did not expect. "I would like to see your daughter, sir. May I come in?" said a very familiar voice.

"Who are you?" Said my father.

"Just a delivery for her."

"Oh, in that case, you are welcome."

"Thank you," said the voice.

At that moment, the voice's owner walked inside my home. _My home.

"Toothless?" I said, as I recognized him.

"Yes, it's me," said the boy. Ever since I had returned home, I had not seen hide or hair of the boy. Mostly because I was busy doing my training routine for the upcoming Choosing and some odd jobs to earn the money to buy that gold and silver lined plaque. Really, I was surprised to see him here. How did he even know where to find me?

"You know this boy, Astrid?" said my father, a cautious tone in his voice. I did not like the sound of that.

"Uh, he's just a friend" And totally not anyone special.

"So I'm your friend now?" said Toothless. Well, I suppose he was more a friend of a friend. Besides, I felt like I knew him enough in a month to know he was at least trustworthy. If I had not already exhausted the list of oddities I have experienced a month ago, I would have asked Thor to strike me down for thinking a dragon was trustworthy.

My father's eyes perked up at the boy's statement, obviously trying to figure out what to do with a boy who was seeking after his daughter. Mother seemed to share the same sentiments. "Well, you seem to be a fine lad, you may come in." Toothless nodded as he went inside my home.

As the boy entered my home, I noticed there was a look of apparent disgust that he struggled to hide behind some veneer of civility and politeness. Somehow, I understood that being in my home was unsettling to him. It wasn't until that he called attention to what was bothering him. "Nice decorum you have here."

"Why, thank you," said my father as he gestured to the family collection of dragon trophies. "There you can see the skulls of Terrible Terrors that were caught when my father purged the nest in O-Eight. A collect"

"And there's a Nadder head from back when we married," supplied my mother, a faint smile over her lips. "You got caught under a tree when that happened, remember?"

"How could I ever forget?"

"Your family has killed many dragons it seems," said Toothless, obviously uncomfortable. It must have been like looking at a gallery where human remains were displayed in so much gruesome detail. Honestly, I was starting to grow worried about him, almost as much as I did for Hiccup. My parents grew slightly more concerned.

"Toothless has" I struggled for the right word, something honest, yet concealed the truth well enough to not be an obvious lie. "Experience with dragons."

"Uh yes," Toothless agreed. "Plenty of experience" Because no other dragon related experience can really equate to being a dragon. My parents would think I meant 'had been in a dragon attack' over some, more fantastical explanation. Granted, the whole village practically knew about Hiccup's condition at this point, but I

doubted anyone believed the transformation also existed in the opposite direction.

"Sayâ€¦ now that I think about it, I think I heard about your name somewhere." my father commented. "Now if only I can rememberâ€¦"

"I was on Outcast Island, sir. That was where I met your daughter," the boy replied.

"Oh, now I remember, you were the one who helped save my little girl." Parents always like to think of us as still as being children, unfortunately. "I heard you negotiated peace between the Outcast captives and our chief. That's quite an accomplishment for a boy your age." Oh noâ€¦ I think my insides were starting to contort. I really hoped Toothless would not end up on his list. Of course, Toothless would get on that list.

"Uh, thank you, sir," Toothless replied with confused politeness, but at the same time, I could almost sense a sort of worry befall him.

"Perhaps you'd like to have dinner with usâ€¦" All my life, I've put up with suitors who had big claims and wanted to prove their worth to my father. Needless to say, all of them failed or did not do anything important enough to warrant notice. This was the first time my father was inviting a boy to our dinner table for anything that was not a babysitting job. And it just had to be this boy.

"Uhâ€¦ dinner would sound nice," said the boy, it was clear to me that he was uncomfortable, maybe Toothless finally learned when people were suggesting romantics, especially since neither of us were 'fond' of each other. "Though I must respectfully decline, I have things I need to do tonight." I gave a small sigh. At least dad was not going to make me have a date tonight.

"Oh, perhaps some other time then."

"Maybe," Toothless said offhand, causing the unwanted plans of my father to stall.

I had plans to ensure they would be postponed indefinitely. Hopefully Toothless would play along.

"Say, how's Camicazi doing?" I asked about myâ€¦ apparent twin. It was odd for us to look so alike to each other, one time, Camicazi claimed I must have had Bog heritage, whilst I claimed that she had a Hofferson somewhere in her family. Maybe my parents knew something about it. It was not important, though it would have for an interesting family reunion.

"The Bog Burglar heir?" mother commented. "What about her?"

"Oh, nothing," stated Toothless. "We've all spent time in the same jail cell and wellâ€¦ "

I gave a fake grin. "She once said you looked cute." It wasn't the exact saying and Camicazi was laying a practical joke at everyone's expense, but I imagine she wouldn't mind what I was doing right now. I might have loved my family and honored my clan's wishes, but there was no way I was going to date a dragon, even if he looked like a

boy.

The boy, was at least smart enough to figure out my plan. He added more support to my claim. "Yeah, she did, didn't she? Well, maybe I could get some help writing a letter to her then, it has been a while..."

"Oh, right," my father said blushing, believing that Toothless was already taken. That was fine by both of us. Still, my father tried to remain civil and polite. "Maybe, we can help you with that if you'd like."

"I would appreciate the helpâ€|but now, if you don't mind, I have a package to deliverâ€|" Toothless handed me a small wooden crate. Its dimensions were rather long, yet also narrow. I wondered what it could have been. I opened the box by sliding open a lid from one of the long sides.

Inside the box were a handful of arrows, three in total. Each possessed a silvery tip with a rune carved on both sides. The same kind of arrows that led to me talking to a dragon in my house and devastated a monster. I do not recall having asked Hiccup to make them yet, since I figured he would be too busy to make anything on his own time. And I didn't think Fishlegs could have done itâ€| meaning there was only one person left who could have done it. And he stood right in front of me. "What's this about?" I asked Toothless.

"Oh nothing, just thought you'd like them," Toothless commented. "Especially since we both have a vested _interest_ in them." I understood what he meant. Alvin had done us both wrong, on many levels. He had imprisoned us, destroyed my axe, _and ripped off Hiccup's legs._ I think all of us had an extreme dislike of that freak. Maybe, just maybe all of us would not object to putting his head on a spike.

"Oh, so you plan to practice archery now?" said my father. He wasn't there at the battle, and likely, few people knew about the special properties of these arrows.

"Just a little," I commented. Archery just wasn't something I focused on. I preferred to get up close to my enemy and control his actions from there, moreso than long ranged combat. Snotlout was better at me in the axe toss every Thawfest because of that. Still, these arrows were the only weapon any of us knew that could harm Alvin. I suppose I could just do what Hiccup did and just stab Alvin with them. I had to admit, only a real Viking would do something like that. "Thanks, Toothless."

"No problem," said the boy. And with that, he left my home.

For a dragon, I suppose Toothless was rather well nice. Now that I thought about itâ€| he was very much like Hiccup. Slightly different in many ways, but they were rather similar. Especially in their bodies, and currently, their interests, what with their desire to practice both mundane andâ€| arcane forms of crafting. Just as odd was the fact that the fact that Hiccup was taking on the shape of a Night Fury, the same kind of dragon Toothless had been. Really, what were the odds of all of that happening?

Maybe the kind of dragons people turned into depended on personal interests and similar traits. Alvin turned into a vicious killing beast because he had always been like that. I think that Snotlout is going to develop into a Monstrous Nightmare and well, if that was true, he was always self destructive and hard to control. Maybe if say someone was vain about their appearance or their self image, maybe they would turn into a Nadder? Maybe the reason Hiccup was becoming a Night Fury was becauseâ€¦ he was very similar to a Night Fury to begin with? He always was a bit of an oddball and Toothless had said there were no other Night Furies, except for him and his mother. Or it could all be a coincidence and I am senselessly trying to apply sense to a completely mad world. I was trying to make sense of how people turned into what kind of dragonsâ€¦

I sighed. At the very least, I could look forward to facing Hiccup in the Choosing. Maybe under different circumstances, I would have gotten angry if I found that the dead-last worst Viking on Berk excelled in Dragon Training, but few Vikings could ever lay claim to breaking an entire island while behind held captive.

The potion may have changed his body, but not his mind or his will. He used his mind to defeat Alvin that day, not strength or the ability to recover from nearly any wound. And that was not something the potion gave him. Sure it may have made things easier, but really, would Hiccup have won if he had used those things alone? Maybe, just maybe, he had the potential to be a great Viking and none of us could see it before he started becoming something else.

* * *

><p>My visit to Astrid's home was not what I had expected it to be. Sure, I had managed to accomplish what I had originally set out to do, but I did not expect myself to end up in a situation where I was expected to be courting her of all people. I understood that it was not meant to take place then and there, but rather it was a potential promise for the future. If Hiccup or Snotlout wanted her, I suppose it was their choice, but no way was I ever going to consider taking a human for a mate. Besides, I did not have enough status to make a good claim anyways.

To be honest, I've never actually thought of ever taking my own mate before, as the only other Night Fury I have met wasâ€¦ mother and I was not crazy enough to mate my own mom. I suppose Hiccup probably counted as a Night Fury at this point, but he was male, so I would not be courting him. That and the fact I was far too young to mate. The only reason I was even thinking about this stuff now was because I needed something to distract me while I walked back to Fishleg's home. Things of a romantic nature were not something of a priority, due to simple lack of eligible femalesâ€¦

Except, I now had plenty of those now.

While my King's Laws did allow for Kin of different Breeds to have what amounts of mated status, such couplings did not result in any young. Usually, mates of such couples would employ surrogates with wages and everything, with the primary mated pair raising the resulting young. But because of my status of being a lone Night Fury, I could only mate only in legal terms, not sire young of my own. At my age, it was expected for us to make offers and promises for mating in the next winter.

That was before I became human.

As far as either me, Hiccup, and Fishlegs, or anyone else at all could tell, I was human in every way. My senses were human, leaving me blind to scents and weak eye, but at the same time allowing me to taste and experience a world of flavors I had never dreamed of. I could not fly or swim as effectively as I used to, but at the same time, I found it far easier to walk on the ground than I was used to before. Overall, it seemed my body was human in every way that mattered. Did that also apply to human mating? Could I take a human for my mate, both in law and in nature? I had little idea of how that would actually work, but if it did, that was one more thing that I could never do before.

On the other hand, could I change a potential mate into a Night Fury, thus granting myself an eligible mate, whilst still returning to my true form? That was something I did not consider when I started trying to understand the book Hiccup left behind. If I looked hard enough, I could probably find such a human, willing to undergo such a change. After all, Camicazi thought she would enjoy being a dragon and I met her within mere _seconds_ of my change.

I shook my head, snapping myself free from my thoughts. I did not have time for such thoughts. I had to focus. I needed to understand what I was dealing with, not wrap myself up in a delusion that I could take some human for a mate. Maybe if I stayed human for a few more winters, I could consider.

I stood outside of the door to Fishleg's home. I knocked on the door, prompting the door to open with a creak. It was time for my nightly lessons in literacy. While I had only the most basic understanding of Norse 'runes', because I picked up some understanding when working alongside Hiccup, I knew I needed to learn more if I ever wanted to be able to understand Hiccup's book. It was the cause of all of our problems and perhaps, understanding it would provide me a way to return everyone to their rightful forms. Especially since that would fulfill my oath concerning Snotlout.

The other reason I wanted to learn Norse writing was so that I could perhaps set up a way my Kin and the Herd to communicate, despite not sharing a common tongue. In theory, all anyone really needed was something to write on. I was not going to tell anyone this until I got past what Fishlegs described as 'sentences', which are collections of runes that form a phrase. So far, I could figure out a few basic words, like 'chair' or 'hat', or 'clothes'. Reading was far simpler and while I could also write their runes out, but my hand writing was apparently very sloppy. Still, it was fascinating. Runes each represented a sound, which combined to form words, which combine to form sentences, which then combined into paragraphs. And each step had its own meanings and connotations based on how the runes were organized.

"You're late," said my teacher.

"Sorry, I almost got married," I stated offhand, much to Fishleg's disbelief.

"With Astrid?" I could see Fishleg's jaw hang slightly.

"Well, her father thought it would be a good ideaâ€¦ We convinced him otherwise," by that, I meant that Astrid and I said I was already taken, even though I really was not. Hopefully Camicazi could appreciate a good deception if we ever told her.

"Uhâ€¦ rightâ€¦" said Fishlegs, changing the topic. "So how did giving Astrid the arrows go?" While I was learning how to read, I had also convinced Fishlegs to help me read the book so that I might be able to follow its directions. All I had to do was answer a few questions pertaining to my Kin and he was willing, though extremely hesitant at handling the book. So, until Hiccup returned, he would be reading me directions while I did most of the work. The first thing we had managed to complete were the arrows, the same arrows that worked on principals we could scarcely understand. But I needed to understand.

"Astrid got the arrows," I said. Unfortunately, there went the majority of my coin until what Gobber describe as 'payday' on a day called 'Frigg's Day'. I did not know who Frigg was, but she must have been important to have her own day named after her. Because I had to melt the silver in my coins to get enough metal to provide the materials, I only had a few coppers in my possession. At the very least, Astrid seemed pleased.

"So, are you ready to begin today's lesson?" I nodded. "Great, so now that you've got some grasp on Norse, I think I should inform you that Norse is not the only language needed to read the book."

"It's not?" All this time, I had been assuming that I would just need to learn Norse runes and learn.

"Nope," said Fishlegs. "There's different languages all over the world, and each has its own written and spoken forms. In fact, some languages even have regional variations and sub-dialects. Trader Johann even told me a story once about a country where there were nineteen different ways to write the word 'sword'." Then again, Hiccup had said time and time again that he could not bring himself to read the book fully. As I told Hiccup once before, all Kin spoke the same tongue, yet I had recalled hearing every now and again that the humans did not share that ability. The same might have applied to their writing. Maybe that had something to do with a 'dictionary'.

"So then what languages are needed to read the book?" The fact that there was just so many different tongues was overwhelming me, I needed to narrow it down to whatever was relevant to me.

"You know Norse, which is what Hiccup and I were able to use. And well, I've heard that at one point, Hiccup's grandfather wanted to teach him Latin, the Roman language, but passed away before he could do that. And aside from that we don't even know what the third one is." When I first received it, I once tried to get a glance at the book, trying to see if I might be able to use what little I learned from examining Hiccup's design documents to see just how little I knew. I couldn't even read past the first page before I had to quit in frustration. Now that I knew that there were three different languages, I realized that I was going to have to work very hard if I wanted to get what I wanted.

"So, what do we do?"

"Well, I will continue to teach you of course, I just wanted you to be aware that I cannot teach you everything." Which meant that I might need to find a tutor who could help me. Not sharing the same tongue just seemed incredibly frustrating. Humans, it seemed were rather lacking in the area of communication at times.

"Alright, so what else do we do today?"

"Well, I'm glad you asked," Fishlegs said as he gave me a notebook. He turned open the first page and in there was a single line of text. It read: "I am," followed by a string of runes I could not recognize. "Today, you'll be learning to write your name."

My name. I've gotten used to people around me calling me 'Toothless', instead of 'Night Fury'. I felt it was more personal, like people were acknowledging me, my identity, instead of calling me by a title or by my breed. And in a way, I've grown quite attached to it. It was mine, after all. I got it, for no greater deed than merely existing. I still did not see the point of writing it out though. "You want me to write my own name?"

"Yeah," said Fishlegs. "You'll need to write your name for a lot of things. Especially when people want signatures."

"Signatures?"

"Signatures." The larger boy picked up his pen, a stick made with charcoal attached to it and wrote some runes on the notebook. I assume that it was his name. "Writing your signature is sort of like a confirmation, a proof that you're the one who is using your name." I nodded, beginning to understand. Signatures were in their own way a proof. "Plus it's good practice and well, you're going to have to learn how to write your own name eventually, especially if you want to write letters."

I knew what letters were. Hiccup's father had asked if I wanted to write to my kin and just before he left, Hiccup had sent several to a few others he called "Heirs", like he and Camicazi were. Writing a letter certainly seemed far more effective than transporting a message by spoken word, where a courier might forget what to say or misspeak. Terrors, for all of their uses, simply were not perfect at remembering everything. Letters were far more precise and could also be longer if needed.

Of course, if I were to write a letter, who would I write to?

Well, I had only one other ally who was not on Berk. And while Hiccup had written to her, I had not done the same. "Speaking of, can you help me write a letter?" I said.

"To who?"

"Camicazi," I stated. Other than Hiccup, she was the only other person who accepted me the moment we met; Astrid and Fishlegs both required some convincing before considering me trustworthy. Plus well I was beginning to wonder what was happening to her. It would be nice to keep tabs on her.

I wonder what Hiccup would have to say about that.

* * *

><p>When father had lead us back home, I was hoping that the villagers were too busy or too distracted to pay any attention to me. Of course, a hunting party consisting of two teenage covered in dragon scale and the village chief, with everyone carrying a load of furs was going to raise at least several dozen eyebrows. Especially in the pre-noon market place, where everyone was up and about. I was just glad they were more interested in the things we killed than they were about me.<p>

Both of us carried the pelt of a larger beast, alongside a small collection of animal carcasses. Snotlout had his bear pelt and I carried back the remains of the deer we slew on the first day. Almost all of the other animal carcasses was either birds and smaller animals; father did not want us to kill so much big game that we had difficulty carrying everything back into town.

Overall, I felt enjoyed the trip out. Not so much because of the killing, I felt somewhat uncomfortable having to repeatedly kill things for sport, but rather for the first time in my life, I was actually able to compete with Snotlout in something. Something that a Viking should actually be able to do. Hunting was not an activity I would do again if I had the choice, but I had to admit, I was at least somewhat good at it. In point of fact, I had actually beaten my cousin by two rabbits. Though that might have had to do with the fact I could actually see where I was shootingâ€¦| The ability to see clearly in darkness in one eye was actually pretty handy when trying to stalk beasts in thick brush. It might have been cheatingâ€¦|

As I discovered when we slew that bear, taking that potion did have positive benefits. The strength was nice, allowing me to finally do the things everyone else could do, yet I couldn't. Seeing in the dark was a plus, since that gave me the lead over my cousin. Now if only I could do something about the scale growth, I could consider taking the potion completely worth it. Sure, recovering from every single injury was all well and good, but I did not like having my body being warped in such a disproportional manner. One of my arms was at least two inches longer than its opposite now, putting uneven strain on one side. I so wanted to figure out how the potion worked and fix it. But that would have to wait until I had more free time.

I saw the villagers gawk at Snotlout as he paraded himself and his bear pelt. I could practically feel my cousin radiating pride and accomplishment with the way he held out his chest. Cursed of not, felling a bear was a feat of strength that nearly everyone admired. Sure, I may have had a claim to part of that beast and I did want to receive some of that praise and admiration, but I did not want to spoil in his glory. So in other words, pretty much the same thing that happened before, only well, we had scales.

Despite my cousin's attempts to draw attention to himself, I could see that some of them had started turn their focus and attention to me. One of them was a just kid, some boy, maybe seven or eight, looking at me with a wanting look. I could tell his features were rather sullen and dirtied. Another was an old woman, who appeared as though the years had taken their toll. Then there was a man who had lost a hand, and walked with a wooden cane. And that was just some of

them, each of those faces that looked at me looked worse off than the last. None of them seemed to hold any scorn for me and I wondered for a moment what is it they wanted.

The boy approached me, slowly cautiously. He was obviously afraid of me. "Uh, can I help you?" I asked. I did not want him to be afraid of me, I did not want anyone afraid of me.

The child struggled to speak, stuttering on the words a little. "M-may I have this?" The boy pointed at the small rabbit that hung from my belt. Other than being shot by an arrow and being drained of its blood, it was in good condition. But why would this little boy want that?

Then I realized, those people were not looking at me. Rather they were looking at furs and meats I carried. They were the poor, the down trodden, the people who lived lives of need. While, Snotlout had the bear pelt, I had the most furs, the most meat on my person. They did not care that I was a monster; they were more concerned about getting food in their bellies, enough warmth to last the winter. They might have gone to see Snotlout, but well, he was Snotlout and he was busy with the crowd.

I didn't deny what the boy wanted. I gave him the rabbit he had been eying. I saw his features melt as a relief and joy seemingly washed away dirt and grime. "Thank you," said the boy. And then he ran off, with an energy that could only be described as hope.

More of those in need approached me, first the old woman and then the crippled amputee. Each wanted something and I gave them in turn.

Soon, I was bereft of the spoils of hunting. It wasn't as if I needed any of it and well, father said I had the right to do with whatever I had slain. Why not give it to those who needed it?

While the crowd of poor people had disappeared as soon as the last skin and scrap of meat had left me, I had found myself the center of someone else's attention, specially everyone's. Snotlout, my father, and what felt like the whole of Berk had their eyes seemingly locked on to me.

"Son, why did you do that?" My father asked.

I did not understand why he was asking such an obvious question. "They needed it," I said. This caused the crowd to gossip amongst themselves. I hated gossip, it usually meant I had done something wrong, yet again. And just when, Astrid finally believed I might have had a real chance. "Why? Have I done something wrong?" I asked, hesitantly. I might as well know what I did wrong this time.

"No, nothing's wrong," said my father.

"Then, what's everyone looking at me for?"

My father gave a small smile. "Because you're still human, my son."

I locked my eyes at him, trying to understand what he was saying. It made no sense. I was practically a quarter of the way to being a

dragon and now they acknowledged me as human, what kind of logic was that? "What do you mean?"

"Just listen," said my father.

I did so. What I heard surprised me. Sure, I was right about them talking about me, but what they had to say about me was not what I expected. "He just gave them his spoils, just like that! All they did was ask!" "Maybe that Hiccup isn't all that bad, after all." "You know something is wrong with the world when a dragon shows more kindness than your own kinsman." "Well, is he a dragon?" Everything I heard, seemed to imply that the village seemed to be having second thoughts about me. I mean, I just gave some furs out because someone needed help, I was not expecting everyone around me to do this.

Snotlout, looked at me with a slight disapproval on his face, since he was no longer the center of attention. I just had to steal the fire stone, didn't I? "Uh, sorry," I told him. After the whole bear incident, I really did start to think that it might have been best we worked together in the Choosing; I did not want him against me. That plus, suddenly having everyone's approval, even if for just a trivial thing, was something I was not used to.

"Whatever," was my cousin's only reply. He was clearly upset about it, but he was making an attempt at hiding it.

"Don't worry Snotlout," my father assured him. "You'll get your fill at Choosing."

This caused my cousin to smile a sharp grin. "Yeah, I can hardly wait. I can't wait to show off what I can do there!"

Father and I arrived home in about an hour, mostly due to father taking stops every now and again to deliver some of our spoils either to merchants or to communal inventories. Snotlout had also requested a tailor to make his bear pelt into something he could wear, a sort of costume or battle garb. My cousin and I parted ways back when we were near his house.

As we entered our home, I could tell that most everything had been left where we had left it. Well, almost everything. At my writing desk, there seemed to be an endless supply of paper that had been written on with varying degrees of legibility. It must have been Toothless.

While Gobber was technically Toothless's host while we were away, my teacher did not have much room in his workshop/home to really support more than himself comfortably. To that end, Toothless was expected to more or less watch over the house, with Gobber checking in regularly. As for where my friend was, I had no idea. Though, it was not hard to think he would be exploring town.

My father placed what little remained of our hunting meat into a cooking pot. It was not bear meat, so I was already looking forward to lunch.

While he did that, I searched through some of the pieces of paper. I could tell that the former dragon was trying to learn how to write properly and it seemed that he was making some improvement. He had

went from not really understanding runes, words, or symbols to having a very basic understanding of word structure. I also found several pieces of paper where he was attempting to actually write his name correctly. Fishlegs might have been helping him, given that the pages and page of paper were more or less close to what their intentions were.

It did not surprise me at all Toothless wanted to learn to read while we were away. From the moment I told him what literature was, it seemed like he had made it one of his goals to accomplish while he was stuck in human form. Honestly, I did not know what he would do with it, but he just wanted it all the same.

Habitually, I sorted the papers into a neat pile, mostly so that when Toothless needed them, he could just search through them later.

However, there was one piece of paper that had caught my attention. At a glance, it appeared to be of a better quality than anything else Toothless had written. At the top of the paper was a statement that read: _"Dear Camicazi,"._ It was not just an ordinary sheet of paper with words on it, but a letter. A letter to Bog Burglar. It was at point I heard someone speaking. "Hiccup!?" I dropped the letter. I turned and found myself facing Toothless, dressed up in his red tunic and black fur jacket.

"Uh, hello, Toothless," I said, feeling slightly embarrassed I had almost just read a letter a friend of mine had to another friend, with both of them coincidentally being of the opposite sex. I just hope it was not something very personal.

"You're back!" It was clear to both of us how painfully awkward the conversation was, yet there was nothing we could do about it. The only thing we could do was to speak and hope the conversation became easier as we kept talking.

"Well, my dad did say we'd be gone for three days, this is day four, so yeah, we'd be back."

"Oh yeah. So how was hunting?"

"Fine! I gave most of I caught away!" I told him. "I see you took up writing while I was away."

"Yes, I wanted to be literate." While a great number of Vikings could read somewhat, most had to be forced to learn it. I was, as always, an exception. I took up reading and writing because they were activities I could do better than most anyone my age could do.

"Well, that's good," I said. "I saw you wrote a letter! To Camicazi." I really hope it was not something... personal or else things would have gotten even more embarrassing. Not a good idea to read a friend's letters.

"Uh yes, I did! I wanted to know how she was doing."

I nodded. At this time, I scanned the housing, not finding a trace of my father anywhere. He might have left to go do something, but that made it safe for me to ask, "Say, you get my book back from

Fishlegs?" I did not specify which book, in the event father was overhearing. While I revealed the potion's existence to the whole of Berk, I did not want to reveal the source of my knowledge. Mostly because I did not want anyone getting the wrong idea and deciding to destroy it, and because I did not want anything to take it away from me. I was just glad that no one else seemed to be interested in the arrows I made; I did not want to suffer same thing Alvin did.

My friend pointed to the pillow on my bed, well, technically, his bed now, implying that it was hidden underneath. "Yeah," Toothless seemed rather hesitant to speak for a moment. "I kind of been having Fishlegs read it for me."

I stood there for a moment, pondering. I wondered what Toothless could have possibly used that strange knowledge for. While, having another pair of eyes trying to study the book was great, I did not want to risk the chance of Toothless could have gotten hurt by that knowledge. I did not want more people getting warped and twisted because of that strange, barely understand tome. I had to learn more about what my friend had done. "Uh, so what did you learn?" As I said that, I drew my book from under the pillow.

"Oh, just making some arrows." Which obviously were the same arrows that made a Night Fury human and caused Alvin's arm to fall off.

I turned the pages of the book until I found the article describing the enchanted silver arrows. It was then, I noticed something that I failed to notice back when I first made the arrows. "Oh no," I gasped.

"Is something wrong?" inquired Toothless.

"Uh yeahâ€¦"

"There's a page missingâ€¦" Specifically, a page so cleanly and delicately removed from the book that the only remnants of it were a very thin tear of paper hidden deep into the book's spine. And the worst part of it was, this page was right smack dab in the middle of the page for the supposed paralysis arrows. Well, they might have stopped a dragon from flying and using its fire breath for sureâ€¦ But this revelation had made it clear that I was using the wrong arrows. I lacked the recipe for the paralysis arrows and instead I was shooting some other type of arrowâ€¦ that causes dragons to turn human and destroys the flesh of someone who drank a potion. Just when I had thought that having a book made up of three languages could not get any worse, there were missing pages.

"That could be bad."

"Oh, just when I thought the gods were starting to like me," I said, in frustration.

Toothless tilted his head sideways. "Say, Hiccup, what are gods?"

* * *

><p>The whole Astrid's emotional sceneâ€¦ Somehow, I really cannot imagine anyone, except for the most cold hearted or simply extremely pragmatic individuals to not shed a tear when placed in her position. Even as cold as Astrid was during the movie, this is a

situation that wellâ€| she would be forced to open up. She's also in private with her only witnesses being her parents, so she's more open there. We're also not going to see much of Astrid's familyâ€| as I do not have any references for them and I feel uncomfortable with making OC stand-ins for her.

****As for Astrid/Toothless ship tease. I just thought it would be hilariousâ€| Mostly because neither of them would support it and work to sabotage a pairing involving them.****

****Toothless'sâ€| explanation of how the dragon madrigal system works is the result of me thinking of what a society made up of what iseffectively multiple races that cannot interbreed would work like.****

****Toothless references what the Germanic peoples called Friday. It was named after their goddess Frigg, who is Odin's wife. She also appears in the Thor movies by Marvel/Disney.****

****Oh and for those of you wondering about the "nineteen different ways to write the word 'sword'" bit is a shout out the specific Jet-Li movie and a nod to Chinese history.****

****Because the Norse obviously lacked spotlights, I decided to make an allusion to the fire stone. It's unimportant and not relevant in this story (or am I lying?), but the principal is that it replaces spotlights in this verse. It's just a minor thing meant to translate a modern saying into a universe specific one.****

12. Chapter 12

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****I am surprised this story keeps getting favorites and followers, yet so few people actually review it. I would very much like feedback very much, especially in the upcoming chapters, just saying I would really like to hear your reactions.****

****Notice how little is Toothless referring to dragons as "my Kin".****

****I don't know guys, but it seems rather fishy, this Trader Al. Who is he? He's clearly an OC.****

* * *

><p>So things have settled down into a sort of normalcyâ€| well, for me anyways, because nothing about me was ever normal. It had been a week after our return from the hunting trip and things seemed to have settled down. The village had gotten used to the idea that some of their own had were gradually growing scales every time they so much as tripped on a rock; which tended to happen to me quite a lot, since most Vikings never had to put up with a useless tail. For the most part, they treated me as they used to, as the weird neighbor kid who is well meaning but keeps getting into trouble. It was oddly comforting to have thing return to the status quo.<p>

Of course, things were a wee bit different. Instead of spending hours

on end making nails or repairing a trusty sword, my dad decided to put into practice the old Dragon Training method that he was going to implement while we were at Fort Sinister. Dad really took far too much pleasure at organizing a linen throwing competition at my expense; and Toothless was getting rather good at shooting at rafts, especially when I was on them. Really, sometimes I wonder if being banished would have been the saner option.

It also made me wish I could have had the 'normal' Dragon Training routine, which involved actual dragons. Really, the reason we were not allowed to use the dragons was due to a lingering political fears that I would sellout my own village to liberate themâ€¦ I was practically a quarter of the way there already. Well, truth be told, they were right. I did want to set them free.

Because of my friendship with Toothless and because of my short discussions with him about his own kind, I learned that dragons were sentient beings, as much people as I was. For Vikings to lock and to slay them up for our own amusement, that was cruel and would not happen as much if we valued them as much as did our fellow man. Our treatment of them made us no better than Alvin. And killing a dragon was everything around here. Sure, I wanted to prove myself in front of my village, to be a great hero, but that was not how I was going to do it. That why I'm going to change things. I wanted to show everyone what I saw when I looked at a dragon.

The Choosing was in four days, the Proving was the day after that. For that, I would need to get one of those special arrows again. I wonder what I could do to get Toothless to make one for me.

My father, Toothless, and I sat by the dinner table, enjoying a nice serving of oatmeal. It had been strange for the first few times, but I have gotten used to having him sitting across me every time we ate. He had more or less taken over my job while I was busy with father and on one or two occasions, he ended up assisting my father on some tasks. I was a bit upset that he sunk the Hopeful Puffin.

My father wasâ€¦ eying me. I did not need to guess what he was thinking. In the past week, due to various accidents, I had received numerous cuts, bruises, and other assorted injuries; nothing as majorly body deforming as losing my legs, but I was half way covered in scales at this point and I have started to slouch a bit more as I walked. His two students were becoming less of his family by the day and he knew he was partly responsible.

Snotlout was a bit less careful that I was. Ever since he had taken down the bear, he had become rather careless about his actions. One time, he even thought that using his head meant using it as a bludgeon. He had ended up growing curved horns in addition to some claws, nowhere near as sharp as Alvin's, but would leave a mark.

Our meal was rather noisy, each of us were discussing how our days went, typical ordinary stuff. That came to end when there was a knock on the door. As I was the closest to the door, I hurriedly went over to open it.

It was someone familiar, holding a bag of some sort with the inside filled with a wide variety of folded up parchments. "Astrid?" I stated. I had not had much time to visit Astrid since we arrived, at best, we met at lunch time in the Great Hall and that was that.

"Uh, hey, Hiccup," she stated, sounding rather awkward. "I've got some letters for you." I had heard that she had become rather busy as well, mostly getting a part time job— apparently that job was mail courier. Although why was she delivering at dusk? Did she get paid extra to work later in the day? She rummaged through her bag and pulled out three letters. Two of which were addressed to me, the other for Toothless—

I took the letters from her hands. "Uh, thanks." Despite spending a month in the same cage as Astrid, it was still rather strange to be— with her like this.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" she held her palm open.

"Oh, right." Business was business after all. I gave her a few coins.

"Pleasure doing business with you," she said, while back pedaling out of the house's threshold. She turned and looked at me, a small satisfied smirk. What a pleasure it was.

"What is it, son?" my father asked.

"Just the mail," I said.

"At this hour? It's almost nightfall."

"That's what I thought."

"So anything for me?" my father stated.

"No," I replied as I passed Toothless his letter.

"No?" the father gave a short laugh. "Why, I am the chief, why am I not getting any mail?" This was ignoring the fact that my father received letters constantly. Pretty much every other day, my dad received letters from someone. This was one of the few times when he was not receiving anything. And apparently, he wanted to joke about it.

"Because you're not a dragon," I said offhand. "Only dragons get mail at this hour—" Toothless eyed me as if I had lost my mind, for the most part, I might have. And well, sometimes I feel like I should make fun of my own deformity. I made fun of me being a toothpick of a Viking for most of my life, I might as well add scales to my list of things to roll with it.

"But Toothless is not a dragon, my son," my father stated, a short laugh erupting from his throat.

This statement caused my friend to cringe a little, but I saw he was trying to hide it. "I am a dragon," my friend protested. Technically, he 'was' a dragon, but that was beside the point. He was giggling slightly, realizing just how— silly that statement was no matter how it could be interpreted.

"Oh really, what kind of dragon would you be?" my father asked.

I supplied the answer, "A Night Fury." The whole conversation was

probably going to be thought of as a joke when it was over, but at least dad won't be able to say we did not tell him.

"Yeah, a Night Fury," said my friend. "One of the fastest and most powerful dragons there is."

"Really?" my dad stated feigned in disbelief, spoiled only by fits of laughter. "I can imagine it now, Toothless the Night Fury soaring through the night sky and pillaging Viking livestock. Maybe burn down a few catapult towers while you're at. Boy, that's hilarious. You two have such crazy imaginations."

I turned and looked my friend who was shaking his head in utter disbelief. We had just told my father that Toothless was a dragon and he had seen fit to think it was all a fantasy. Really, was it so hard to believe that dragons could undergo a transformation into human form and blend in seamlessly with us? I mean, the reverse was happening right in front of him, nearly every day.

After dinner, I went to my writing desk to review my letters. Sure enough, I could see they were from both Camicazi and Thuggory, the two I had written in the previous week. It was also likely Camicazi wrote back to Toothless, since I could not imagine who else would write to the former dragon.

Since I had not had heard from him since Fort Sinister, I decided to open Thuggory's letter first. While I was hoping he'd send over a package, something that would help me and Toothless with decrypting that book's secrets. A guide to translating Norse and Latin would be a blessing from Odin himself. Instead, what I got was a letter.

_Dear Hiccup, _

I heard about what happened to you and I wish I could help. Really, I do.

Your little jail break gave my Tribe some of our people back, from them, I learned what happened on Outcast Island. It's been the talk of the town. You and Alvin turning into dragons, one of which became an unstoppable killer, only to be bested by a boy. Can't say that I expected any of that. And all I really did was give your cousin a room for a night and you've been held hostage for a month. I don't think that makes us even, so I really would like to give you a helping hand.

I don't really get all this sorcery stuff, it not something the Meathead tribe likes to focus on. I also don't know my way around the library that well, so I don't know what books you'd need. But I know someone who might know a bit of both. I can set you up to meet the Hairy Scary Librarian and last I checked, the Meathead Public Library was well, public. It shouldn't be too hard to convince my dad to give you some sort of diplomatic immunity, especially since wellâ€¦ Alvin.

Thuggory

P.S. What were you thinking writing two separate letters? Can't you just use one?

Okay, so I had what amounted to an open invitation to Meathead Island and to check out its library. While I had wanted a book to be delivered in secret, so as to keep the source of my knowledge hidden, it appears Thuggory did not feel the same way. All I needed to do was convince dad that it would be safe for me to go. As far as I am aware, the Meatheads were trustworthy enough.

The worst however was dealing with the Hairy Scary Librarian. At several gathering involving the Meatheads, I had spotted an old man with a beard so long that he could use it to wipe his feet several times before. Despite the supposed silliness of that description, he was quite terrifying. I had heard stories about how he would patrol the Library and cut down trespassers (despite it being Public) with his special twin swords called Heartslicers. Needless to say, I was not to thrilled about meeting him up close and in person.

Sighing, I opened Camicazi's letter next.

_Fancy hearing from you Hiccup, _

_This is Camicazi, you're kind of too late. I already nicked the designs from that little black book of your's back when Fishlegs had it. Got some smithy to work on it and I've got. _

_Wanted to go hunting Alvin with my mum, you see. I wanted to take maybe a leg or two when you got his hand, just a fair payment for giving me a lovely little vaction on his island. _

Well, we found him, a few days back. Had a nasty fight where I got a few scrapes, but I did manage to get someone to shoot that arrow into his back.

_Nothing happened, well, nothing amazing happened. Had to retreat, couldn't beat him. You know, Alvin's making a mess out here. _

Are these arrows defective? Cause on one hand they turn a dragon human, on the other they cause a man's arm to explode, and when I make them, they do nothing.

_Did not do the same with the potion though, thanks for giving me the recipe. Tried it, and as you asked, did not tell anyone. I couldn't brew it the way you described though, don't know why. Always turns green and nasty. And I was so looking forward to spitting acid and turning invisible. _

_Why is it that you can do this magic stuff but I can't? _

_Hoping to take Alvin's head,
>Camicazi

P.S. Uh isn't one letter enough?

Well, I am a little upset Camicazi went through my things while I was unconscious, but at least she had done what I had asked, especially since part of it was done before she even knew I had made a request. I was a little surprised she'd used the knowledge of how to create the arrows to take down Alvin, but I suppose that was as good a test as any. Plus, if it worked, that would have been one less problem for all of us.

I was also thankful she did not get the potion recipe and tried to brew it for herself without instruction. The last thing I wanted was to be implicated in the assassination of the Bog Burglar Heir while being a freak no one really has an idea of what to do about. That was practically a one way ticket to beheading.

Still, the fact that she told me that both items failed to work indicated either that she done something wrong when creating them or there was a specific reason as to why I was able to make use the knowledge in the book. As I would like to think that Camicazi is intelligent, I was leaning towards the later. Why was it that both Alvin and Camicazi failed to work with the arcane knowledge inside a Night Fury clad tome, yet I could? Did that also mean that the arrows Toothless made would be equally as ineffective? I guess I had to make my own or something, just in case.

To me, sorcery made no sense, it was not like melting iron and hammering it into a desired shape. There was some important information that I just knew I was missing and that if I had it, I would be able to understand what was going on. Maybe Gothi knew more about this stuff; she had been practicing the strange for as long as anyone could remember. If anyone could help explain this stuff to me, it had to be her.

Even more senseless is that fact that neither of my two recipients got the message to send a public message and a secret, private letter so as to conceal our messages. Instead they just wrote back only once for both letters, not even bother with such thing as secrecy. Okay, maybe I am getting a little too paranoid.

I do not believe some people. I had practically told Hiccup's father that I was a dragon, a Night Fury, no less and he did not believe it was possible. He thought it was an illusion, a fantasy. I guess I could not blame him, I was starting to doubt myself.

I opened Camicazi's letter, careful not to set it on fire by placing it too close to the candle I held. When I wrote that message to her, I asked her again about what her feelings were on becoming a dragon. When we had learned of Astrid's dream, that Hiccup would give everyone the choice to become dragons, Camicazi accepted that possibility by wondering what kind of dragon she would turn into. My letter to her was me questioning that possibly.

I learned quite a bit of reading in the path month, still no where near as much as Hiccup or Fishlegs, but enough for me to understand the gist of a Camicazi's response. Even still, I was not able to read most of what Camicazi had written, but I was able to understand what must have been the important parts.

_Hey Toothless, _

_You learned how to write. Your penmanship is not that bad, you know, for a boy. And you have the sense to not write two letters before getting a replyâ€¦ _

And yes, I do think becoming a dragon would be rather neat. Look how it turned out for Alvin and he's not even half way done by the looks of it.

_Say, you've been a dragon before, what's it like? What's flying

like? Or spitting fire? It must have been fun setting things on fire when you wanted it._

Camicazi

What did being a dragon feel like? I could barely remember. I was having a hard time recalling what it was like to have the wind under my wings, to see through my ears, to feel the fire of my Breath in my mouth. Back when I was a Night Fury, I never bothered to think about it. Being a dragon was just normal. I didn't need to think about it, I just was. I didn't pay attention to every detail and sensation I felt, why would anyone need to? I do not think anyone ever thinks about the possibility his body will become that of a completely different species before. Now that I had adjusted to being human for a month, it felt normal. Using hands for everything, walking on two legs, wearing clothes, that was normal to me now. I suppose I'll ask Fishlegs or Hiccup to help me out later, they knew more about Norse than I did.

As for now, there was something I had wanted to do. I approached Hiccup. My friend was reading his letters and writing his responses, I could only guess as to what was on them, but I did not need to know. While I had an idea of what Camicazi might reply with, I had no idea who Thuggory was. All I knew was a library was what Hiccup called a collection of books or something, maybe it was important.

My friend turned his attention to me. "Toothless?"

"Yeah, it's me, bud." I gave him a curt grin, trying to hide my anxiety of this matter. "I've got something I want to talk about?" This was something I had been thinking about for some time and only now was I revealing this plan to Hiccup. I had figured that with the way things were going, Hiccup was just only going to get more and more dragon-like until eventually it would be more accurate to call him a dragon who was slowly becoming less of a boy. I wanted him to be ready if that ever happened. And I wanted to reconnect myself with what I truly was. I was just too human now.

"Something on your mind, bud?" he asked me.

"A little," I understated; there was plenty on my mind. "Hiccup, how's your tail?"

Hiccup groaned a little. "Annoying. I really wish I could just cut it off, but I know it would only grow back." Over the past few days, his tail had been little more than a nuisance. While for one of my Kin, a tail served to provide balance to the body on the ground as well as provide control in the air. On a mostly human body, it was only a hindrance. Hiccup had control of it, but he did not know how to use it. Often, it got in the way of his feet because of subconscious movements.

"Well, I was thinking maybe I could teach you how to control it?" After all, I had lived with one for my whole life. I did miss my tail.

Hiccup looked at me skeptically before asking, "Is this dad's idea?" I shook my head. "Well, what did you have in mind?"

"A swim," I stated. When young dragons are hatched from their eggs, it is usually done underwater to contain the explosive force needed to break open their eggs from the inside. As a result, all of dragons instinctively knew how to swim. Granted, I don't think human births were anything like that. I think getting Hiccup to use his tail in swimming would help him immensely, especially since I had something to follow up with it later. "Down at the docks, you interested?"

"No, but you're not going to take 'no' for an answer, so I'll go anyways."

I gave a grin at his response. "Oh, that's good, I was afraid I was going to have to drag you off."

"Oh, I wasn't afraid of that."

I blinked my eyes at that statement. "What do you mean?"

"You know, I am a bit stronger than youâ€| and quite frankly, I am getting somewhat good at actually fighting nowâ€| I would probably come out on top if it came a fight."

"So then why are you agreeing on going?" I asked.

"Because I know that you'll bother me about it for the rest of the night. You have stubbornness issues."

"Well, you do say I am sometimes more of a Viking than you were," I joked.

"Just give me a moment," Hiccup gave a sigh, but he wrote a note. I could read enough to know it was just to inform his dad where we were going to be. It was getting rather late and neither of us would be. "Just in case dad thinks I ran away."

* * *

><p>I really hated this job. Late nights for only a minimal wage was not something I was looking forward to, but this was what I expected. Unlike most of those my age, I did not spend much time practicing trade skills when I was younger. I was so focused on winning honor and glory for my family that I did not put much time or effort into learning things like basket weaving or cooking or cleaning, things that would have qualified me for better jobs. Now that I was scrounging around for some extra income.<p>

Sure, my family was well off and did not really need the extra money, but I did. While my father could afford to supply me with a dozen cheap hatchets bought at practically meaningless costs, I was not content with using such weapons. I broke my uncle's axe because of many mistakes I made; I wanted to make its replacement to be worthy of being called such. A few dozen cheap axes might kill things just as easily as any dragon, but I wanted something more than that.

And that was why I was spending my dinner time delivering letters around Berk. It was the highest paying job I qualified for. It was easy, if a bit unexciting, but it was what I needed. A solid job which paid enough that I could potentially buy a solid replacement axe in a few weeks. Really, the only reason I qualified for this job was because I was willing to deliver to the places on Berk no other

courier would dare enter. Unsurprisingly, one of them was Hiccup's house. Another was Gobber's workshop whenever he refused to bathe for a few weeks. The three block radius around the twin's house is also considered back.

Those I did not really mind, well, except maybe Gobber after week three. What I did mind was my next delivery zone. It was a house that was build far, far away from the rest of the village, surrounded by a field of cabbages, and it belonged to an old man who was definitively more disliked than Hiccup, even on his worst days.

I had to deliver mail to Mildew.

I did to want to do it, but I was being paid double as compensation. There was no way I was going to miss out on it if all I had to do was make a delivery. Really, I was surprised this was an issue in the first place. Who in their right mind would be sending Mildew letters? I guess I shouldn't be complaining too much, I was getting paid extra, whoever was writing these letters was not an issue.

So here I was, right outside of Mildew's house, making my last delivery of the night. I could see the faint glow of light on the inside, indicating someone was inside. I approached the door and knocked it a few times, indicating I was here.

There was no response.

In frustration, I knocked again. There was clearly the glow of a fireplace on the inside. Mildew had to be inside, no one else would be in his house using his fireplace.

I began to grow worried. Sure, Mildewâ€¦ was Mildew, but he was just an old man who lived by himself. And really, he could pass away at any time without any of us noticing. He might have been a really, really unpleasant man, but he was still one of the villager. I had to make sure he wasâ€¦ fine, as unwanted as the thought he was still alive was.

I twisted to the door knob, surprisingly, the door was unlocked, giving me free passage to enter. I had heard that Mildew had been an adventurer in his youth and his house definitely held trophies of that era. While there were the almost typical dragon trophies, there were trophies from various other creatures from all over. There was a bear pelt styled like a carpet, along with the head of what appeared to be an abnormally large wolf's head mounted to one of the walls. Above the fireplace was what appeared to be a seal skin. I wondered for a moment on what each of these items represented for the old man, each of them was unsettling to look at.

I found Mildew sitting by a chair in the fire place. I could tell he was alive and well because of his snoring. By the looks of things, he was fine, just having fallen asleep and not in any danger. I gave a sigh of relief and decided to make my way out of his house. I could just tell my boss to make a follow up delivery.

Unfortunately, while my entrance was mostly silent, my exit was unnecessarily loud. I spent on a loose board which gave a loud creak. Mildew, stirred awake in an instant, picking up his staff to use as an emergency bludgeon. I ducked just in time to avoid his strike. For an old man, Mildew appeared to be quite good at defending myself.

"Trespasser!" he stated. "What are you doing here?" To be fair to him, I was technically trespassing. Maybe I shouldn't be so concerned about what happened to the old man no one cared about.

"I just wanted to deliver you your mail, but you would not answer door, so I went in to check on you," I told him the truth. Hopefully my employer understood my intentions and did not dock my pay.

Mildew clearly did not care for my intentions. He grumbled something unintelligible, but it was clearly meant to be a curse of some sort. "Just give me my letters," he spouted. I reached in my pack, pulling out the last letters it held, all three of them were addressed to Mildew. I had no idea who they belonged to, but they must have known Mildew somehow. The old man forcefully snatched the letters out of my hand. He scanned the letters, making sure things were happening alright. "Well, everything is in orderâ€¦I suppose you'll be wanting paymentâ€¦" Of course I did, but at this point, I was sure that no payment was not going to be enough.

Mildew, in continuing with his lack of concern for others, just threw a small sack of coins in my general direction, requiring me to pick up each of the individual coppers and silvers when the spilled out of the bag.

I tried suppress my scowl and disdain for the old man. Honestly, what could have been done to make someone this hateful?

I just shook my head and left the property as soon as I had my payment. I was going to need petition that soap be added as part of my wages. After dealing with Mildew, I felt like I was covered in mildew.

* * *

><p>It only took us about few minutes to head down to the docks. After spending a week to get myself antiquated with the area, I was able to find my way around the village. Really, the layout was rather simple when it came down to it. There was the docks at the bottom of the cliff base, mostly stores at the heart of the settlement, farms at the outer reaches, with everyone living close to where they worked, sometimes living where they worked. I still did get lost every now and again, but at least I was not a failure at navigating.

At night, the docks seemed mostly empty, with everyone who lived close to them more interested in having dinner or spending time with their families. There were a few men who patrolled the docks, mostly men who spent their time repairing or maintaining their ships when they were at port.

The moon was at the gibbous phase, soon to be the full moon in a day or so. It was our only light aside from a small oil lantern I held.

I turned to the waters. The bards sing every now and again of how it was from the sea that all life had descended and that, dragonkind, our Kin, were the its greatest children. All life came from the sea and it was to that place that I was going to be send Hiccup into. I turned to him. He spoke, "You know, I'm pretty sure that I can still drown, unless I suddenly grow dragon gillsâ€¦"

"Dragons don't have gills," I stated, before correcting myself. 'Tidal' class dragons, as Fishlegs stated were completely aquatic and often spent their whole lives submersed in water. They had gills. "Well, Night Furies don't, but we can hold our breath for an hour. Besides, you're close to home, what do you have to be afraid of?"

"Riptides," Hiccup stated flatly. "Well, rip currents." Hiccup was afraid of having the tides pull him out to sea? They were no threat to any dragon, since we are born swimmers and could easily take to the skies even from the waters. The waters really only threatened the young hatchlings and even they could just stay afloat long enough to wait for the currents to subside.

"Is that all?" I stated. In fact, if that was the only threat, I was almost tempted to go out into the waters myself.

"Humans, not even Vikings, last long out in the sea," he stated. "At best, we can hold our breath for mere minutes and we don't float like dragons do, so we have to constantly keep swimming to stay afloat. Fatigue gets us eventually." I suddenly found myself reconsidering my course of actions. Hiccup seemed to have caught on to what I was thinking. "It's good to know you've thought this through."

"Sorry," I stated. "Maybe this was a bad idea." I was not a dragon anymore, I had human weakness and human frailties. I would die a very human death.

"Can't be worse than any of mine," Hiccup stated. "Besides, I've got a solution already." Hiccup went over to a coil of rope and picked it up.

"So you're still going with this?" I stated. He could have just as easily stayed silent about it and we could have just went home, instead he goes on and thinks up a solution to a problem that he was originally unwilling to do.

"We're here anywaysâ€¦ and I might as well find a use for this tail of mine."

I grinned at that. I was finally going to repay some of my many, _many_ debts that I owed to the boy.

We walked down one of the piers, one which looked rather stable and seemed vacant. Looking back, there were the lights of the buildings of the shore, dockworkers doing whatever it was dockworkers did at this hour. No one was going to bother us, so we were free to talk about what we wished, provided we were not so loud that someone who was not in the know would overhear us.

Hiccup removed his tunic and tied one end of the rope around his waist, forming a sort of impromptu belt; I tied the opposite end of the rope to one of the wooden pillars that supported the pier. Hiccup's solution was simple, but effective; if he got caught in a current, we could pull him to safety. It did not seem there was any currents right now, but all the same, it was better to have a fallback plan in case I was wrong.

Hiccup sat on the pier, his feet dangling off of it. "Alright, so why

do you want me to swim anyways?"

"You remember that whole bit about seasickness and skysickness we had when we met?"

"How could I forget about a conversation about motion sickness?" Hiccup stated.

"Well, back when us hatchlings first get our flying lessons, we're often told to think of flying as 'skyswimming'." I knew that, sooner or later, Hiccup was going to grow wings and I felt that he would really appreciate the ability to fly. If he was going to be a dragon, I wanted him to be ready to experience that. Swimming practice was the first step in learning to fly. "I want you to teach you how to fly." Well, there was one other thing I wanted to teach him aside from

Hiccup raised an eye brow at. "Flying?" I nodded. "So you want me to learn to swim so I could learn to fly?" I nodded again. "Well, do know you as a Viking, I was trained to swim at a young age, right?"

"I've seen you swim," after I sank that raft Hiccup made with a flaming arrow. "I don't think it's called swimming when you flail your arms in random directions." It was very humorous though and Hiccup came out of that unscathed.

"It is," Hiccup protested, before realizing how foolish he sounded.

"Even your dad was a bit embarrassed," I stated.

"Okay, so I'm not the best swimmer on Berk," Hiccup stated, a small tone of resentment in his voice. "But what makes you think I'll be better off swimming like dragon?"

"You'll be fine," I lied. I was having a number of second thoughts. What if Hiccup was right? What if he was not able to learn how to swim the dragon way? I had to put a stop to those thoughts before we aborted this plan completely. I pushed Hiccup into the water, he screamed a little as he fell in.

Poking his head out of the water, Hiccup spat out the bitter tasting salt water. "What was that for?" He protested.

I ignored his statements. "Don't move your arms and legs much, just use your tail to move around."

Hiccup tried to flick his tail under the waters, to no avail. "Like this?"

"No," I shouted. "Make yourself horizontal, like you would if you were swimming normally."

"Toothlessâ€¦" he stated, but tried to do as I said anyways. He spread out his arms and legs to provide flotation while he tried flicking his tail again. This time, he moved slowly in the direction he wanted to go. The human body was not designed to handle the pressures or motions of how dragons swam, but it was progress. At least he did not need wings for this part.

"Good, now, take it easy," I stated. I forgot what was supposed to be done at this part. It had been so long I had actually just went into the water and just swam, that I had forgotten much of it. And really how much of it was even possible to do for a human? Dragons, despite being much larger could float in water with relative ease; Humans apparently could not. I stood there for a moment, trying to think. I doubted Hiccup would have any difficulty just trying to swim.

That was when I noticed that Hiccup had disappeared. I scanned for my friend, fearing the worst. Maybe the rip current actually got him? I did not want to go tell Stoick that I had his son drown. I did not want to tell Gobber I had killed his apprentice. I did not want to lose my best friend. I raised the lantern, hoping the extra light would give me enough visibility. I found Hiccup's head, poking out in the distance, a fair distance from when I had seen him last.

"Are you okay, Hiccup?" He seemed fine.

"I'm fine, I just thought you wanted to be left alone for a moment." Hiccup stated, not betraying any sarcasm. "You were right, swimming is fun." I blinked. What had happened when I had taken my attention off of my friend?

"Uh... what?" I asked. At that moment, Hiccup went underneath the water, the only proof of his existence were air bubbles that escaped to the surface. Those bubbles came right at me, relatively quickly, before stopping within arm's reach of the pier. Hiccup's head resurfaced only a moment later.

"Have to use my dragon eye to see underwater, but it works," Hiccup said, seeming rather proud. "Night vision and sea vision." Well, most dragon eyes did work that way, same with Night Furies.

I just sat there for a moment, trying to process what had just happened. My friend was swimming, relatively well. While I could not see his form underneath the dark waters, speed like that meant that he was rather well adjusted to swimming. Definitely more so than when I was learning how to walk. "How?" was my only response.

"Well, when you decided to ignore me, I just... experimented a little. After that it all just felt... natural to me. Like... like I just knew what I needed to do." Natural. My friend stated that it felt natural to him, as in, he was well used to an action. Maybe it was just another part of his transformation? I learned how to speak Norse just because I turned into a Norseman, maybe turning into a dragon gave him knowledge of how to swim? Did that also apply to flying?

I just gave a sigh. I had been expecting to spend more time trying to teach him the basic of swimming, only instead to find that my supposed student was rather good at it. It was especially jarring since he was not that well of a swimmer of the human method. Well, look like I am not paying off a small part of my debt after all. "I'm never going to get to teach you anything am I?"

"Doesn't seem like it," Hiccup stated. "Are we done here?"

"Uh, sure," I said as I grabbed my friend's hand and pulled him out of the water. "Well, there's another thing I want try to teach

youâ€|"

Stepping on to the pier, my friend had a question, "What's that?"

"How'd you like to learn how to use your tail as a weapon?" Even though dragons did not have weapons like humans did, we still kept less. Admittedly, as I did not have one, it would be difficult to teach them, but I could try.

"Alright," said Hiccup, sounding a bit hesitant, but complying nonetheless.

"Great." Maybe there was something I could teach him after all.

"On one condition."

"What condition?" Conditions might have been tricky, but if it was necessary, I think I would accept. Besides, I doubted, it would be that bad.

"I get to choose where we practice."

* * *

><p>Toothless seemed to get rather uncomfortable at my request. Well, to be fair, he had no idea where I wanted to take us. After all, I could state my desired location was somewhere that the former dragon found to be unpleasant. Well, that wasn't going to happen, mostly because I did not know what places the dragon disliked being in, aside from anywhere near a certain old man. Still, that thought must have never occurred to Toothless who cringed his teeth. "Don't worry you, big baby," I said. "I think you will like where I want us to go."<p>

"I will?" Toothless questioned, his fear and unease waning.

"Yeah," I said. "There's this place I found a week ago that I think you might like." I was of course, referring to the place I went to when I wanted to vent my frustrations, that sink hole with its own caves and lake. I describe a little of what I remembered of it, Toothless's eye narrowing at the prospect. Aside from looking beautiful, it would have given us plenty of space to train or do whatever it is we wished, especially away from prying eyes.

"Okay, so I guess we'll go there tommorrow?" stated Toothless. I nodded, it was far too dark to walk there at this time, so obviously going when it was brighter was the best bet.

"After whatever crazy training routine my father has in mind for tomorrowâ€|"

Toothless smirked for a second before stating, "Something your father calls 'Shields as Weapons'." Which meant that my dad was going to be having me stick to using my shield for a variety of tasks in an obstacle course. Most likely, it was going to involve more projectile linens, an abandoned shack to be set on fire, and a goat. I did not know what the goat was for. Clearly, as his son, I was not trusted enough to be given such privileged information, while Toothless was.

"Thanks for telling me," I said dryly, I was not looking forward to that.

"Don't mention itâ€¦ Like really, don't," said Toothless. "Don't want your dad to find out."

Once I was sure the water stopped dripping off my body, I put on my tunic. I was rather surprised I found swimming to be quite easy, all I had to do was keep my body straight and use my tail to provide the motions. It was as if, I had already known how to swim. Maybe it was just something intrinsic to being a dragon, something that I would know because I was becoming one? Toothless learned Norse just by becoming human, I might have learned how to swim the same way. Not to say I was incapable of swimming before, it was just that, compared to everyone else on Berk, I was near the bottom at the swimming aptitude tests.

We stepped off the pier not a moment afterwards. I glanced over to Toothless, who was visibly shaking, the oil in our lamp had run out, giving us nothing but the light of the moon and a few dimly burning torches. "You okay?" I asked.

"It's nothing," said Toothless, who was shivering a little. "Let's head back, right?"

I didn't press him any further. Something had scared him, but I didn't want to upset my friend by forcing the answer out of him. Besides, if he was willing to tell me, he would have.

Before leaving the docks, Toothless and I turned back for one last look at the sea, mostly just to take in the sea at night. There, out in the distance was a tiny pinprick of light coming right at us. Well, not right at us, more like in our general direction. It was not hard to figure out what the source of the light was, given that it was moving over the waters and moving towards the docks, I figured out it was a ship of some sort.

My suspicions were confirmed as it approached, its large sails becoming more visible. Moreover, I could see that it was fairly larger than a normal Viking longship and was tall enough to have a lower deck. "What kind of ship is that?" Toothless said.

"A tradeship," I said, then put it into terms he could understand. "Think of a mobile, floating store."

"Hmâ€¦" Toothless pondered. "I wonder who runs it then." I asked myself the same question. It was far too early for it to be Trader Johann, unless he had a special delivery or something. Obviously, he wasn't only trader who sailed near our island, but he was certainly our favorite. Which meant that it was someone else.

"Come on, we'll tell dad when we get back. He might like the news."

My friend nodded and we were on our way as the ship entered port.

* * *

><p>When my son and his friend had disappeared for the night, I had

almost turned the entire village upside down to look for him. I had only stepped out for a moment to do some last minute chores around that house only to find those boys gone. I had almost lost my son once, at the hands of a hated enemy; now that he was gone for a second time, I feared for the worst. He could have been kidnapped by Alvin again, or worse, he might have decided to run away.<p>

Fortunately for me, I had found his letter on the door frame telling me that they had gone for a midnight swim. I was upset that my son had not bothered to tell me in person, but I supposed it was better than any of the supposed scenarios I thought up coming true. And to be fair to him, he probably needed some time to think of what was going to happen in the next few days anyhow.

I sat by the fire place, contemplating. The Choosing was happening in only three more days, not counting today. Nearly everyone in the Tribal Council was still confused over Gothi's decision, but most had believed it to be a political maneuver or a test. Alvin was able to defeat several warriors that were his peers single handedly, would two boys who underwent the same treatment have the same result?

While I could see Snotlout doing well, I still worried for my son. Sure, he was stronger now, but not to the freakish levels Snotlout or Alvin had displayed. At best, he was finally on an even level with everyone else. That still did not make up for his years of inexperience due to my neglect in tutoring him. While he could heal from any wound, all that healing would drive him closer and closer toâ€| not being my son anymore. Though I have made both he and Snotlout as ready as I could be, I could only hope I prepared them to be enough. On the other handâ€| I had very little doubt that they would come out alive. It was impossible for me to slay Alvin in pitched battle, and at best my son disabled his arm. I still barely understood how he did it, maybe I should ask him one day.

I closed my eyes. I wanted to remember him as he was before, wholly human. I wanted him to be that way again. I did not care for the strength or the power he received, I just wanted him to be my son. But something in my heart knew that it would never be.

I opened my eyes when I heard the front door creak open. My son and his friend stepped through the threshold. "Hiccup?"

"Hey dad," my son said, with a small cheer in his voice. I guess he might have enjoyed his little night swim in the harbor. He did not seem cold either, like he had not spent some time in the autumn harbor. Maybe that was just another aspect of what he was. "You get my letter?"

I nodded, "Uh, Yes. How was your swim?"

"Oh, it was fine," said my son, not really explaining anything with his statement.

Toothless added in his own, "Uh, yeah, just a normal night's swim at the docks. It was fun."

Hmâ€| well, as long as they were fine, I guess that was all there was to it. "Justâ€| remember to tell me in person, before you go off like

that, boy. I almost thought Alvin came byâ€¦" And a small part of me almost thought that Hiccup's letter was a forgery, meant to distract me. Okay, that might have been a little too paranoidâ€¦

"Okay dad," my son said with what might have been a faint blush. "Well, Toothless and I will be spending some time outside of town tomorrow and the day after," he said.

"Alright, I understand," I replied. It was typical boy stuff. For once, my son had a friend who was willing and able to do â€¦ boy stuff with. I did not want to deny him that privilege. Besides, what harm could those two do outside of town anyways? I decided not to think about that. While Toothless seemed to be an upstanding young lad, my son was probably dangerous enough for the both of them. "Justâ€¦ stay say safe."

"Alright dad," Hiccup groaned.

"Oh hey, Chief," said Toothless. "There's a ship that just docked in the harbor, you might want to check it out."

"Hmâ€¦ really?" I asked. While it was not unheard of for ships to appear at night, whatwith the weather being fickle and unpredictable and following only the whims of the gods. Still, ships that arrive at port need to receive a proper vetting. "I'll check it out before going to bed."

"Speaking of going to bed," my son yawned. "It's time to hit the hay."

"Butâ€¦ we don't sleep on hay," complained Toothless. I smiled as the two boys walked away.

I turned my attention outside. It did not take long at all for my to find the merchant's ship. Being a sailor and all, I could in fact tell the difference between ships made in our own Barbaric Isle versus ships not made locally. It stuck out like a sore thumb based on the wood alone. First off, it was not made of oak, which is the wood associated with Odin. It was probably made of cedars or something. Second, was that the wood was not overlaid, plank over plank, as is common in clinker hulls, instead the planks were organized parallel to one another, forming a smooth grading. Obviously, this craft was not made by Norsemen.

Once I had seen, I had already known who was coming. The boat's owner disembarked the moment I had arrived. He was no Viking, so the man was not a mountain of muscle as was common in these lands; instead he was a skinny pencil of a man. In other words, common for a foreigner. "Chief Stoick, we meet again," said the man.

"Al," I said, with a curious tone. Al was a trader, like Johann. Really, there were dozens of them all throughout the known world; Johann and Al were just two of the ones who stopped by Berk every now and again. "And here I thought you would not be showing up this year."

"You must understand," said Trader Al. "My king is the one who sets my route, I only follow his whims."

I just gave a snort. "Does your king rule so much that he has to

decide how you trade?" I had never met Al's King or even so much as learned of his name or even the name of his homeland.. Al says he comes from a far off land that is so far away that we would not recognize the name. Still, I did try to respect the man's privacy. As long as he was not a war criminal or something, I had no reason to pester him about it. It was his business after all.

"Well, I choose to follow his laws, his orders," said Al. "And that means obeying his orders on when and where I visit what ports."

I laughed a little before patting the man on the back. "Alright, I'll admit, you're very loyal. Your king should be glad to have such a loyal subject in you."

"Thank you, sir" said Trader Al.

We both turned towards the top deck of the ship. There were other figures aboard the vessel, mostly men, slightly burlier sailors who Al kept around to help him exchange goods. Most of them, I recalled seeing the previous years before. Except that this time, men were not the only people aboard the craft.

"Now who are these?" I said as I pointed to the figures. There were four teenagers aboard the craft. One of them was a young lass with fiery red hair, another was a slightly burier brunette lass who was the tallest of the four, and lastly were two teenage boys with blonde manes, perfectly identical twins. As soon as I had spotted them, they all put on confused and bewildered looks.

"Unfortunately, I must follow my king's orders," said Trader Al, with a mournful tone. "Even he makes decisions that do not please everyone, I, myself, included." While that gave me some idea as to who these kids were, it was not enough for me.

"So who are they?" I insisted that he properly answer my question; it was my harbor after all.

Al just gave a defeated. "Apprentices, students," he replied. "My King requested I take them when I was to meet you, so I have. There was to be a fifth, but he was unavailable."

I nodded, apprenticeships were a big deal. Most people usually inherited the jobs of either their parents or of their teachers. These kids might have been scions of wealthy or influential people and thus were being tasks to learn trading from Al. "I see." I went on deck to approach those kids to introduce myself, it was in my best interests to make a good first impression to secure future trading partners. "I am Chief Stoick the Vast, Chief of the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans."

The red haired lass tried to say something, but it came out only as confused stutters. "I amâ€|" as if she struggled to speak her own name.

They all looked at me with expressions of shock and fear. That was strange. I had done nothing wrong to them and they were looking at me as if I had destroyed something precious of theirs. Trader Al stepped between us and led me away from the children. "Uh, they aren't used to dealing foreigners," he said. "Especially _Vikings." _There was special emphasis on his last word.

"Oh, that," I said with a bitter tone. Yes, we Vikings tended to pillage nearby settlements on occasion, but fighting was not all we did. Most of the time, we were traders and sailors, not warriors. We may pride ourselves with blood and valor, but that wasn't everything to us. Foreigners tended to forget this. It was always one of the biggest barriers we had to overcome when meeting people.

But enough about bitter and depressing things. As we went away from the children, I decided to change topics to the more mundane and tried and tested. "So how long will you be staying this time?" Unlike Johann, Al tended to stay several days in port, usually, this was to make the best possible trades or make stockpile on goods for the long sail home.

"For the whole week," said Al. I nodded, this was normal all things were considered. The men mostly stayed aboard their own craft, but sometimes, they did spend time in local taverns. Overall, typical sailors. The problem was that he was going to be staying long enough to see what had changed since he last visited. "By the way, is there anything happening as of late?"

I almost did not want to tell Al about Hiccup, but I did not know if any Viking alive was able to help my son. I needed as much help as I could get. If no Viking was able to help my son, would non-Vikings fare better? Surely, a Trader who had traveled farther than most men might have heard of something like this before. I could only hope. "Well, yes, there is," I said, hesitantly. "Have you heard anything about humans slowly becoming dragon-like?"

"I might know a little about that," said Trader Al. "What has happened?"

"My son has been cursed," I said. Well, technically, he drank from some sort of potion that was supposed to make him stronger, but that did not change the fact he was still transforming against his will. He was cursed as far as I was concerned. "He becomes more of a dragon every time he is wounded."

"Then I think I can help you," said Trader Al. My heart skipped a beat. I finally had someone who could help me and my son. The gods must have finally decided to take pity on my family.

"Really?" I said, feeling, for once, relieved. Things were going the right way.

"Yes, of course," said the merchant.

"How?" I asked. I wanted to know more about how he could help me, anything at all.

Trader Al ordered one of his men to fetch him something. The sailor disappeared below deck and promptly returned with a hard leather tome. I knew what it was. Trader Al was a sorcerer. "My family had practiced these arts since the time of my ancestors, who passed down these traditions for generations." And not only was he a sorcerer, but he came from a whole family of them. He had not advertised this before, but I did not blame him. Sorcerers were often people you feared and spoke only of in soft whispers. Even our Goths, for as much of an old tiny woman she was, she was one of the scariest people

on all of Berk.

But I did not care about that, Trader Al claimed to have the qualifications to help my boy. Sorcery had gotten my son into this mess, and it was clear to me now that sorcery was the only way he was to escape. "What do you want from me?" I said. I was practically willing to pay any price.

"Oh nothing much," said Trader Al. "I'm sure we can work something out. Now, when can I see your son?"

* * *

><p>Notice how little is Toothless referring to dragons as "my Kin".

I don't know guys, but it seems rather fishy, this Trader Al. Who is he? He's clearly an OC. And what's up with his crew.

Also, Mildew... has a special roll in this story.

Now, things finally get to be interesting again.

Next time on Becoming the Enemy:**Hiccup meets Trader Al and Toothless teaches Hiccup some draconic martial arts (not Kung Fu of course, martial arts does include stuff outside of Asia.). And lastly, we have the Choosing coming up soon. **

13. Chapter 13

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Merry Christmas, though this chapter is a bit late for it. It is in time for New Year's though and is currently the longest chapter I have ever made to make up for it.

Still, enjoy and review. A certain chapter I have been waiting to write is coming up.

* * *

><p>The time less than an hour before sundown was Hiccup's only daylight reprieve from his father's training, giving us a few hours before we would return home. Our schedules had most cleared by this hour, with Hiccup's father and Gobber running out of training exercises and orders respectively. It was our time. My friend had taken us to this sinkhole a fair distance away from Berk's only settlement. It was a perfect place, a little hideaway all to ourselves.<p>

I doubted Hiccup would instantly learn how to fight like he did swimming last night. Unlike swimming, which was intrinsic to a dragon's very nature, combat was something I had to learn as a Squire. Because dragons lacked metal weapons like humans did, but possessed wide and varied natural weaponry, we have developed many methods of fighting using our very bodies. Each of these forms of combat all made use of every appendage and advantage a dragon's body had; We were our own greatest weapons. However, because of this, it

was impossible for a dragon to master them all since some of them required specific body types not every breed shared.

I sighed. Sure, I might not have been a master of those arts like One Eye was, but I was good enough at some of them to instruct others. Hiccup spoke up as we sat down by the small lake afforded to us, "You know, normally at this time, I'm supposed to have a break from training, not have more training." According to his father, Hiccup's training today consisted of using shields in rather unusual manners, some of which included throwing them around or using them in place of a sword. Apparently shields were good for more than just defense.

I gave him a curt grin and responded, "You could always back out."

"And miss growing _even more _scales. Honestly, sometimes I get the idea that you and dad want me to become a dragonâ€¦"

"Well, you'd make a great Night Furyâ€¦" Just as much as I made a great Vikingâ€¦according to Hiccup's father or to Astrid's, much to my displeasure. I fit right into my friend's world, almost better than he ever did. I wondered, if that was the case, would Hiccup fit in mine?

"Don't remind me," Hiccup said. "Soâ€¦ what are we learning today?"

I grinned. I was finally going to teach him something. "Well, we're going to learn about tail fighting."

"Tail fighting?"

I nodded. "Tail fighting is the most basic form of combat all Squires learnâ€¦ and it's the only method I could teach youâ€¦ for now." I said as I pointed at Hiccup's tail. With a motion it jerked off to the side as my friend became aware of it. Tail fighting was basic, simple. It was the only form of combat that was almost universal amongst all Kin. All dragons possessed tails of some sort and they were often strong enough to use as weapons. While dragon tails tended to vary in function and form, they were close enough alike that a standardized martial art could be developed. Sometimes, even commoners get to learn if the need is great, but most of the time, it was restricted to the Knighthood. I hope my King would forgive me this trespass, but I feel it might be necessary.

"So I get to learn how to whack people using my tail?"

"And more," I said. Most of time, tails were used for positioning or for knocking an opponent into a vulnerable position for more lethal appendages to strike. The use of the tail in combat was always a risky maneuver, as one wrong move often meant losing the ability to fly and often times swim. Only Gronckles risked using their tails as primary weapons, because they did not need it for flight. Hiccup however, would never have to worry about such things, wounds refused to stay long on the boy.

I instructed my friend to go into a fighting position. Both of his legs were firmly planted on the ground and his back was held firm. It was clear his father had done well in teaching his son something so basic. It was human fighting stance, Hiccup was not dragon enough to

take on a more draconic position. This was the drawback to me teaching him this style of fighting. I had to make adjustments and improvements to suit a more human form. I had spend about a month training with Astrid to know about how to fight as humans did. I was terrible at it, but I thought I knew enough to start mixing the knowledge together.

"Now then, where's your tail?" I asked Hiccup.

"Uh, behind me?" he replied, not really knowing. I sighed, but understood. Everyone answered the question the same way.

"But where behind you?"

"Uh," Hiccup said, distractedly. His head moved back to checkâ€|

It was then I tapped him on the shoulders. "That would have been a claw," I stated. "Always be aware of where your tail is at all times, even if you could heal from any injury, it is best to avoid unnecessary injuries when possible."

Hiccup glowered, but continued holding his stance. "So what should I be doing?"

"Feel for your tail," I said. "Try to keep track of where it is in your mind, but not in your sight."

"You'd think that not having had one for my whole life would make it easier to notice," he said.

"Keep it up in the air, try to control it," I said. I gave him direction after direction, each testing how well he could respond to control his tail when it was in his attention. Apparently, it was easy enough to move for the boy, but he lacked the ability and coordination to control it and the rest of his body, except subconsciously.

"Toothless, I don't see how this helps in learning how to use my tail like a weapon." my friend said after a while. This was normal, all things considered. Without proper training, tails were amongst the hardest limbs to coordinate and control. Tails automatically balanced and adjusted themselves based on our movements and emotional states. It was unconscious control over it that allowed us to learn swimming without even having prior knowledge. Gaining control of this movement, directing it towards tasks that were not preprogrammed into it, was the first step in learning to master our bodies. I had my work cut out for me, but I felt that I could get him to use it properly within the three days time I had.

"You need to learn how to control it better, this helps." So far, I have managed to get my friend to running and swaying his tail at the same time.

"Whatever you say, bud."

We spent about an hour doing that. Hiccup had at least learned how to motion his tail where he needed it to go while focusing on other tasks, such as running. It all looked and was very awkward, but it was the fact he had the option to control it that was important.

The next step had Hiccup returning to his combat stance, again. This time. I mirrored him, taking on a similar position learned from Astrid, during that moon under Alvin. "Okay, I don't have a tail, but I don't think it matters right now, right?"

"I'm fighting human enemies, not dragons," he replied. He was referring to the so called Choosing of course. "Well, except Alvin, but I don't think he'd be getting a tail just yet."

"Well, if he did," I grinned. "I don't think anyone would teach him how to use it properly, so you'd have an advantage."

"So, how do I use my tail in combat?" Hiccup asked.

"Well, you've got some control over it now, that should be enough. What I want you to do is to try to strike my legs using your tail."

"Excuse me?" Hiccup asked, confused.

"Try to knock me down,.." Humans walked on two legs their whole lives, remove one from the ground fast enough, they are likely to fall. Even dragons sometimes had to fight on two legs. A smart fighter would exploit this weakness.

Hiccup, without trying to break his stance, tried to swing his tail through my leg. It only wrapped around it. It was something, but not good enough. I frowned, my friend failed to put his body weight into his blow. Hiccup was not putting enough effort into it. He had the strength, just not the desire. "Uhâ€¦ I don't want to hurt you," he said. "Not after Iâ€¦ shot you." And turned me human.

"Don't worry about me!" I said, exasperated. "Look, Hiccup. I'm glad we met, you don't have to hold trying to kill me against yourself nowâ€¦ Just please, fight me. I want to teach you how to fight, even if I have to get a little hurt."

My friend inhaled deeply, mentally reading himself. "Okayâ€¦ I'm ready." This time, Hiccup twisted his body when he sent his tail at me. His tail went through my leg, knocking me on the ground. "Toothless!" he shouted, as fell. He went over towards me. "You okay, bud?"

"Yeah," I replied, dusting my clothing. Finally, I had taught my friend something and it only required me to have some minor bruising and a dirty tunic. "That was good. Want to go again?"

All I had to do was do this few hoursâ€¦ until nightfall. Night fall, where I cannot see anything and wonder what creatures lurk out in the shadows.

No, I was not scared of the dark. I was a Night Fury after all. Was a Night Fury.

* * *

><p>Toothless and I spent the next few hours at our little sinkhole. Mostly, we repeated the same exercises, making sure I had it ingrained in my head. Using my tail was not something I had ever thought of doing, but I was glad I finally could use it for something

other than tripping my two left feet. Now I learned how to trip someone else's.<p>

We returned home at the time dinner was ready to be served. I was practically starving, almost willing to eat a whole pot of soup. Today's training was exhausting, but I enjoyed it. I finally had people who were looking at me for more than just being the scrawny weakling and it was good.

Between the lessons Toothless and my father gave me, I felt I had a real fighting chance of actually being the champion of the Choosing. I would have to better than my cousin, which would be difficult given that he was both stronger and had more years of fighting training, but I was learning fast. I was getting good with the shield, my sword play was 'adequate', and I had weapon that I felt few other Vikings would be prepared to deal with. I could almost practically put my plans into motion.

Although, I could do without the looks of pity for my current condition. It was a relief at first when people were concerned about my slowly waning humanity; but after a while, it was all the reaction I got. I was almost longing for the days when I was just not noticed.

Toothless and I arrived at the dinner table, taking our seats next to where father sat beside. We did not expect to find an additional member joining us. Trader Al sat beside my father. I did not speak to the man as much as I did Trader Johann, but I did see him every now and again. This was the first time I had actually seen him join us for dinner. I could see that the man had cringed a little as he saw my twisted appearance.

"Hiccup," my father said, "How was your day?"

"Dad?" I asked as my friend and I took our seats. "Uhâ€| and hello to you, too, Trader Al. Are you having dinner with us, tonight?"

"Hey, Hiccup. Who's he?" asked Toothless.

Trader Al took this opportunity to bow slightly. "I am but a humble trade, who seeks to peddle my wares. I also have a small interest in the moreâ€| arcane arts." I blinked that; Trader Al had been coming to our island for years and he had never once said anything about having an interest in sorcery.

"Son, Al says he can help us." If this was true, then, maybe I could finally get back to being myself.

I saw Al peer underneath the table to glance at my tail. "Well, Chief, I can definitely I might be familiar with your son's transformation. Now Hiccup," he said, he knew my name ever since I was a small child, but rarely was I the focus of his attention, until now. "What caused this?"

"A potion," Toothless said, answering for me. "Everytime Hiccup is wounded, he heals from it; but he slowly becomes more dragon like each time."

"Yes, definitely, I know what has happened, er uh, who are you?" said Trader Al, with a puzzled expression on his face. For a moment, he

was intent at my friend, before suddenly dismissing it.

"His name's Toothless," I said, "He's a friend of mine."

"Yes, well. I think I know how I might be able to help," said Trader Al as he drew a musty tome from underneath the table. It was a brownish book, which had been battered and burned from years of use and misuse. It must have been a book of arcane secrets, similar to the black scaled book I had.

As Trader Al turned through the pages, I could practically hear my father mumbling over and over again praises and thanks to everyone of the Aesir, in alphabetical order. He must have seen Trader Al as a gift from the gods themselves, like Odin had accepted his offering of three whole yaks a week prior. Soon, Al stopped turning his book's pages, showing me a diagram of several human beings with parts from different dragons. It reminded me much of myself. There was also several lines of text, all in what was definitely Latin text, making it impossible for me to read. "Uh, what is that?" I voiced the question on everyone else's mind.

"This is what had happened to you," Trader Al said. "This potion had been something I had known about for some time. But regardless, it was not original meant to transform people, that being a byproduct of its choice of ingredients." Well, Fishlegs had been right after all. I mean, who really goes out of their way to make a potion that makes you stronger, but also turns you into a dragon every time you got hurt? "It was originally made by a man who tried to make himself stronger, only to find himself becoming a dragon and thus finding himself banished from his own people. Really unfortunate. It is an interesting alchemical concoction nonetheless." I really hoped that that part would not happen to me.

"So, why is Hiccup a Night Fury?" asked Toothless, probably interested if the potion could return him to his true state.

"That has to do with resonance, child," said Trader Al. "The term differs, depending on who you ask. According to some, it is the idea of things of similar likeness being interrelated though magical means. For instance, a rock is connected to the mountain it came from and is connected to every rock from that same mountain, but is closely related to say a rock found on the ocean floor. In your case, you are connected magically to Night Furies, maybe because of your obsession with them. There might be other reasons, but that is the only one I could think of on the top of my head." I just nodded, scarcely understanding any of what he said; Sorcery was something I was still unfamiliar with. It seemed Al defiantly knew what he was talking about. Although, I was not proud of my previous ambitions being well known to him.

"So how can you help me?" I said.

"Therein lies the problem," said Al. "I cannot help here and now, but back in my homeland, I might."

I turned and looked my father , who only waited for my response. This might have been my only chance to return to normal. If I did not take it here and now, would I receive another chance? Al was someone who I have known for a long time, and he seemed trustworthy in all the time I had known him. At the same time, I could not further my plan of

helping Toothless regain his form while I was traveling to some distant shores. I did not know how to respond.

It seemed however, Toothless did. "You should go Hiccup," he said with a smile. I knew how much he valued me becoming a dragon, I was the only other Night Fury, well almost-Night Fury, he had met. Yet he seemed just fine to let me return to my true form. "It's your choice, your decision."

"Thanks," I said to my friend.

"And hey, I'll even come with you if you wantâ€¦"

"No," interrupted Trader Al. "I will only be taking the Chief's son with me, it is best you do not get involve_d, boy_."

Well, that definitely gave me the response I need, "Then it appears I won't be going," I said, causing my father and Trader Al to visibly question the whole world. "I'm not going alone," I said. "I would like my best friend with me." As long as I had known the man, I did not trust him to take too kindly to learning Toothless's origins. His lands, if they could help me, might have been the only place I could have gone to help Toothless. That and I wanted a familiar face to help see things through. Honestly, why did Trader Al prefer I go alone? Surely his homeland was just like anyone else's? Did they just dislike foreigners?

"I would advise against it. Your friend might not be so welcome in my homelands." said the merchant.

I pointed out the flaw in his argument. "If Toothless is not welcome, then I doubt I would be accepted as well."

"Which is true," admitted Trader Al. "Though I imagine they would be more respectful of the afflicted."

"Then it's settled," I replied. "I'm staying home." As a dragon-thingâ€¦ I just was not going to abandon Toothless here to get changed back while he stayed away from his home.

"You are a stubborn boy, just like all Vikings, but very well, I will respect your declination," the man said. "But I will ask you again before I leave Berk." Trader Al got up from his seat and walked out the door, his large book in hand. "I wish you a good night."

* * *

><p>I had no more time for low paying jobs. The Choosing was only a stone's throw away and I had to make sure I was at peak physical performance. I was going to bring my best and beat my rivals and all challengers. And that included a certain boy with warped. Hiccup might have been a friend of mine, but that was not going to mean I was going go off easy on him. In fact, being my friend should mean I should pummel him into the ground, even though that might have meant he would get scales instead of bruises; if I was going to consider him a peer of mine, that meant I was going to have to treat him like one.<p>

Though could I even do that now?

At first, I was confused on why Snotlout and Hiccup were going to be fighting outnumbered. I would have preferred that my fight against Hiccup would have been a duel, a challenge with two fighters on equal footing. He might have been stronger and could heal, but I had more experience and better access to trainers. It would have been a close battle. That was until I saw the results of their little hunting trip. Before, I had thought it was strange elder Gothi was even considering such a crazy mismatch of forces; two-on-six was just insane. Of course, then someone had to go and kill a bear! All things considered, it was probably good thing I could not afford a good axe yet, Snotlout was probably going to crush it in his hands given what I had seen him do with his fists.

Granted, I knew Hiccup was still the weaker of the two draconic humans, that did not necessarily mean he was less dangerous. A knife was 'weaker' than an axe, yet a knife could kill just as easily. Both were pieces of metal strapped on to wood, but each had its own uses. An axe delivered a tremendous amount of energy, efficiently, with each swing. But there was no subtlety in an axe, it was difficult to conceal and its uses were limited. Knives, though, were more than just weapons. A knife was flexible, but lacked power. It was a subtle weapon, one that often was underestimated. Aside from that, a knife could be used for more. In just preparing a meal alone, a knife could be used to slaughter a hen, dress it by helping peel its feathers, cut it up into pieces, serve it, and then be used alongside a fork; an axe could not do any of that without breaking the table. I should not underestimate Hiccup.

Still, it was a fight, a fight where everyone could see me put my skills and knowledge to the test. I threw two axes, each from a different hand at a target on a tree. Each struck parallel to each other. My precision was improving, but would that be enough?

I walked over to the wood embedded axes and deftly pulled them out. Well, I would find out in a few days.

I turned my head, giving myself some room to relax. Night had fallen over my little training ground and it was time for me to return home. I turned my attention back to town.

It was then I had realized I was not alone. There was a red haired girl, one appeared to be my age wandering through the outskirts of town. I had heard there were foreigners, some young merchants in training, around Berk now and I did not recognize her, was this one of them? I approached her cautiously. I did not want to accidentally start a war by harming a guest. "Can I help you?" I asked.

She jumped away from me, appearing to be startled. After that, I saw that her first reflex, instead of running or hiding behind a tree was to plant her feet firmly on the ground, a defensive stance. She must have been a fighter or something, nothing unusual, some merchants tended to take active measures to deter thieves. Granted, who ever taught her should be fired, she was slouching and leaning far too closely to the ground. She relaxed her guard a little once she had time to process her words. "Oh! sorry. I am! looking for! someone."

"Who? Maybe I can help you." Provided that someone was on Berk.

"I doubt you know him," said the girl, dropping completely out of a

defensive stance. "We've heard that he's come to Berk recently and we're here to seek him out."

"A friend of yours?"

"He's just someone I know." Well with that description, I could find most anybody.

"Well, there's been plenty of newcomers to Berk in the past month." Off the top of my head, I could recount Toothless and maybe some of the other captives from Outcast Island. Most of the slaves that came with us from there had gone home to other islands by now. Some had stayed behind, adopting my home as theirs. And since I seriously doubted she knew Toothless as he used to be a dragon, that meant she was likely searching for one of those other captives. "You know, you could see the Chief about it." And then I noticed that the girl was not really paying any attention to what I was saying. Sure, I still had her attention, but it was not my words that ensured her. Instead, she was inspected me with her cold blue eyes. I did not like the look she was giving me.

I stopped speaking, eying her in return. She then opened her mouth and said with an disappointed tone. "You are filthy."

"Excuse me?" I question. Well, I spent practically the whole day working on my combat skills, some of which involved physical contact with dusty training dummies. I also fell to the ground several times due missteps in my routine, one time even landing in a puddle of mud. So I was rather dirty right now. I still did not like her tone.

"You are filthy," she repeated. "Dirty, messy. So unbecoming. I would never be caught in something in such a mess."

"And what exactly is wrong with that?" I replied. The dirt and grime was my proof of a hard day's work. I was proud to wear it most of the time, as it meant actually having done stuff. I was not going to sleep in the stuff, but really, what was wrong with a little dirt?

"It makes you look hideous," said the red haired girl.

I disagreed vehemently. Sure, I did not really care much for beauty outside of formal occasions, but no one insulted my appearance. "It makes me look like a warrior," I said. I would have been well within my rights to duel her, but I decided that since she insulted me, I was going to fight back insult for insult. Side's I did not want to start a war over breaking someone's legs due to a poor statement. "I spent the whole day wallowing in dirt and treading mud. I earned the right to have this stuff on me."

She seemed taken aback by my statement. "That is preposterous."

I scanned her appendage and her attire, looking for things I could use to counter her statement. She was clean, not a speck of dirt on her. Her attire was simple, not really fancy, and more average. Her hair, while red was plain, unbraided, but not a mess. That was enough material for me to make a reply. "And while I might be covered in mud, it's clear what I've been doing. What have you got to show for your self?" The girl narrowed her eyes. "You look clean, plain dull. I suppose it makes sense, you're just a merchant's

daughter."

The red haired girl seemed to get upset at my choice of worse. "I am a Squire," she said in an angry tone. The term, was familiar, though I forgot what it had meant. "I am a warrior and I am not supposed to be here."

I narrowed my eyes, trying to understand what she was saying. "What?" If she was a warrior, then why was she being sent to Berk? I was told she was a merchant by practically everyone. While it was not uncommon for Vikings, especially explorers, to be both traders and combatants, her statement saying she was not meant to be on Berk, indicated that something was amiss. "Why you here?"

"I follow my king's orders, no matter how much it displeases me, even this one," said the girl, before muttering under his breath. "All because of that stupid, stupid male!" Male, as in, not boy or man. She must have been referring to that person she was trying to look for. So this king of hers sent a warrior, maybe more, to go find a specific boy or man.

"What makes this guy so special?" I asked, trying to understand more about her story.

It seemed however that the girl however was paying attention and thus noticed I was trying to ferret out information from her. "I have said far too much," she told me. And then she just turned and walked away.

Something about these visitors of ours just did not make sense. And I was going to find out about it.

Or maybe I was just going crazy, seeing things that were not really there. For a moment there, I was seriously considering the possibility that that foreign girl was actually a dragon. That maybe, just maybe, she was looking for Toothless. Really, she might have been as vain as a Nadder, but that did not mean she was one.

!A!A!A!A!A!

I sat quietly in the field, reading books amidst the herd of nearby sheep under the stary sky. Though it was night out, I was not afraid. I might have been terrified of darkness, but I had plenty of light to keep me safe. I was enjoying my free time now that Toothless had found other activities. I did miss teaching the former dragon how to read, but it seemed that he was taking his lessons from Hiccup and his father when they were not busy with things like training for stuff the Choosing. I will admit that I probably deserve not being selected to compete there. I might have been one of the strongest boys in my generation, but I did not feel at home using that strength to fight, so I did not really apply myself when I was given an exam to see if I was to be selected to compete.

Besides, even though a part of me wanted to be there, I was more interested in my own research. Botany, dragonology, literature, things that require an academic bent were the what I wanted to pursue, though lately, I was focusing on the later two.

I did not want to read that sorcery book Hiccup had, for fear I might

not like what would happen and because I hated not being able to read two-thirds of the text. I still wanted to help my friend sure, but I was not going to do so by turning myself into a toad. So, I was reading more mundane texts, well, mundane in the sense the books themselves were not magical, though their stories tended to involve quite a bit of it.

In world where not only transformation was possible, but relevant, I decided to start seeing if there were other instances of this happening throughout our stories and legends. Back beforeâ€| wellâ€| all this happened, I really only believed stories of seal women or of people turning into bears only happened in distance lands. I never imagined only of my only friends would end up growing scales and a tail one day.

So far though, I had only managed to find a few stories that involved transformation, almost all of them involved articles of clothing and only one involved dragons.

The first were the so called "animal brides" stories. They were about animals, usually seals or manatees that discarded their animal shapes in the form of pelts to become human, almost all of them women. In most of these tales, the pelt was stolen, forcing the trapped women to marry the thieves of their garments. Thankfully, most ended with the return of what was stolen and liberation of these captives.

Another type of story I found involved the Berzarks, Norse warriors who used animal skins to channel some of the primordial might of the creature they tried to emulate. Usually, it was a bear, but often times, they tried wolves and other savage creatures. There were even a couple who lived on Berk and I had spoken to one or two of them. They did not really change their shapes, it was mostly the act of pretending to be a different creature to gain power from it. They did however warn me that they heard of some of their number that, in the throes of rage, would lose themselves and literally become the creature they tried to imitate. Note to self, do not get any of them angry at you.

The last story I found was the story of F  fnir. F  fnir was the son of a dwarf king. He killed his own father to steal his gold and through greed or the use of a cursed helmet, became a dragon. It was not specified what kind of dragon he became, though it was known he was slain by Sigurd. And that was that, no one else in that story changed into a dragon, though Sigurd had to slay his greedy foster father. It was the only account of previous dragon transformations I could find and even then it did not offer me enough.

Closing the last book I had, I decided to lay my back against the base of a solid oak. I sighed. Hiccup's transformation was definitely something new, something no other Viking could recall anything similar. This made things harder, we could not rely on stories or history to provide answers for us; Hiccup had to create his own solutions.

I sat there, looking up at the stars, pondering on what I should do. It was getting late and I did not want to miss supper. Maybe I could play a bit of sheep toss by myself before going home. Some of the sheep did enjoy being tossed up in their air, provided they got caught most of the time. Sheep toss was pretty much the only sport I

did enjoy, if only because it did not involve bashing someone's head or getting bashed myself. I hate bashy ball for both reasons.

Then I heard a noise. It was a voice, muted and distorted by distance. I approached it, curious as to what it was. Who else would be in this pasture at this hour? Well, other than the shepherds who owned the land. As I got closer, I was able to make out more and more of the voice. Someone was singing or at least trying sing.

Sitting upon a rock upon a hill was a girl, my age, but definitely far larger than of the girls I had seen on Berk. She was a brunette. For a moment, I had almost mistook her for a boy, but that mistake ended abruptly upon listening to her voice. She was singing, humming to herself the same, mellow notes, each time trying restarting. She was practicing, trying to get the sound just right. She was clearly far too busy to make notice of me.

I hid behind a stone, care not to draw attention to myself. I did not want the girl to think I was spying on her, that would have been rude. But at the same time, I just was attracted to her, I wanted to listen to her song. She was good at it.

"No, no, no!" she yelled to herself. "Not right, not right at all. I sound horrible."

I did not understand why she was so upset, she sounded great. "No, you don't!" I revealed my position, out of reflex. I clamped my hand on my mouth. That was so stupid. I did not want to bother her, did not want to be a nuisance.

"Who's there?" she said, turning her gaze over to the rock I hid behind. She could not see me yet, as the rock was quite large, but there was no escape now.

I moved out of hiding. "Uh heyâ€¦" I said with an embarrassed tone. How were you supposed to deal with girls again? I could not remember. "I was just listening to youâ€¦ you sounded great." Maybe a compliment or two would be good at this time.

"You think so?" she said, as if confused. I nodded. "Wellâ€¦ I don't really hear itâ€¦ it all sounds strange."

The situation was starting to turn very awkward. She was total stranger and here I wasâ€¦ complimenting her for her singing. I didn't want to say anything that would be embarrassing. "But I'll like itâ€¦" Except I had to have loose lips todayâ€¦

I saw the girl blush a little. "Uhâ€¦ thank youâ€¦"

I stood there, for a silent moment, trying to decide how I wanted to speak. I just wanted to say something that did not make me look like a total moron, was that so hard to ask for?

My thoughts were distracted by the bleating of nearby sheep. A few strode next to us to graze, not really minding the two of us. The approached them, a curious expression in her face. "Why are there sheep here?" she said.

"We keep them," I said glad that I had something to else to talk about other than myself. Facts were easy to talk about. "Us Vikings

practice animal husbandry."

"Facinatingâ€|" she muttered. "What do you do with them?"

I shrugged. Sheep were practically everywhere from what I heard, their uses were pretty much known to everyone. Still, out of reflex, I listed the facts. She seemed to pay very close attention to what I had said. "Well, the usual, meat for food, meat for clothingâ€|" Although, maybe she was just wondering of what we, Viking, did different from other people. I added in another statement. "Wellâ€| sometimes we use them for sportsâ€|"

"Sports?" she said.

"Yeah, like sheep tossâ€|"

"Sheep toss?" She question.

"Yeahâ€|" To be fair, it was a strange sport. Sheep toss was essentially a glorified game of catch, with a normal ball being replaced by a live sheep. The whole point was that it was a test of both strength and dexterity. You tried to throw the sheep as far as you can without seriously harming it; you got docked points and had to pay a fine for bad sheep handling. And sheep, being what they were, were always so trusting of whoever threw themâ€| Hopefully the shepherds won't mind. Well, actually, they'd probably join in if I knew I was playing the gameâ€| Sports tended to make people act weird.

She seemed to think over it for a moment, questioning her next action. "So how is it played?"

I approached one of the sheep. Well, this was definitely the first time a girl was paying attention to me for any length of time something that was not extremely embarrassingâ€| maybe I should show her. I picked up one of the sheep who was not grazing, rather easily; I was quite strong, after all. I backed a little away from the girl, a short enough distance for a short practice throw. "All I do is throw him and you catch."

"That it?"

I shook my head. "Then you throw him back and I catch."

"Okay," she said with a cheer. "Throw it!"

I hesitated for a moment. Though the girl seemed to be large, I had no idea how well coordinated or strong she was. For all I knew, I was going to be seriously hurting her. I gritted my teeth, slamming down on my fears. No, I shouldn't be afraid. I did not want her to think I was a cowardâ€| I threw it. I closed my eyes.

The girl gave a grunt of effort as I heard the sheep slammed into her body. When I opened my eyes, I panicked. The force of my throw knocked her down, sending her to the ground. I moved closer to her, hoping she was fine. The sheep certainly seemed unharmed and just gave a bleat of indifference. I wanted to scold myself for hurting a girl, even worse as it was a complete stranger.

Just then, I saw the sheep hurtling right at me. I caught him deftly,

again the sheep not really seeming to fear for his life. I saw the girl picking herself up, removing the dust from her clothing. "Wellâ€¦ that wasâ€¦ interestingâ€¦" she said.

Automatically, my mouth made my response for me. "Want to go, again?"

The girl seemed to consider my offer for a moment before answering. "Hm, sure."

I threw the sheep, again. That started off a game that probably lasted for an hour or so.

I did not know who this girl was, and I was sure I never had seen her around Berk before. Maybe she was a traveler from afar, a visitor. We had traders and sailors come in from everywhere every now and again; she was likely one of them. I hoped she was staying in Berk for as long possible.

* * *

><p>I beheld the mirror, admiring the face it held, my face. I smirked, with glee and satisfaction for what was about to happen. For once, it turned out that having friends that worked at the nearby general store had perks, a big mirror like this was expensive. I might have wanted one, but that did not matter as much when I had free access every time I went to go see my two best friends. Other than us, we were alone, in the store the two worked at. The two of them would have been doing some boring task called 'inventory', but who cared about things like that? Not me.<p>

I turned my attention back to Tuffnut and Ruffnut, their faces were beaming with excitement. The two twins heaved up a large rock closer to me, adjusting its facing. Everything had to be perfect tonight.

Over the past week, I've had to put up with constantly growing reddish scales everywhere, but I was fine with it. The horns I had were 'cool' though. Now all I had to do was convince father that I was fineâ€¦ since I could now do this; my uncle would rattle on and on about how he broke a rock with his face when he was a boy. Both me and my dad got tired of hearing about it after the ninth retelling. Well, uncle did not kill a bear when he was my age, with his hands alone. I had to have been stronger than him. I slammed my face into the stone, breaking it into pieces with a satisfying crack. Oh man, uncle had left out the fact that fact that hitting your face against a rock hurt.

Clutching my head, I lifted my face from of the stone to see my handiwork. As I imagined it to be, the large rock was shattered into a dozen scattered chunks.

The twins gave shrieks of excitement and joy. "Yeah! Yeah!" "Again! Again!" Even though my face hurt, I tried to them a grin. I was strong after all, there was practically no downside to that.

My vision was a bit blurry but I saw there was something red upon the rock. I touched it. It was wet. And there were theseâ€¦ hard things that felt a little jagged to be just splinters. Oh noâ€¦

My vision returned back to normal as I turned to the mirror again. My face was bloodied in several areas, especially around my nose and my jaw. I opened my mouth and found that I had lost several teeth after bashing my head against the stone. I suddenly realized that I might have made a very bad mistake.

Scale immediately grew to fill in places where I had scratched myself. My face was distorted in place as the red coating was replaced by a different red. Worst of all, I could feel something happening to my jaw, it hurt and became coated in scales, but I just knew that it was not the end of it. It was not happening before my eyes, but I could feel something was happening, I just _felt it._

I suddenly recalled that Hiccup had lost his legs and he regrew and they warped after only a day I lost several teeth, what would happen to me in that time?

The twins however stayed excited, clearly not feeling any of my worry.

No, I had to ignore it, worry was for cowards, I was no coward. I gave a fierce grin, showing my injury to them in full. It was painful, but I still held my mouth open. Pain was for the weak, I was not weak. I wiped off the remaining blood with my tunic, the black fabric obscuring the red. I did not want to see that blood anymore.

"Oh! You lost some teeth!" cried Ruffnut as she saw my mouth.

"Yeah, now I want to lose some too," replied her brother.

"Hey, I saw them first," replied her sister, her tone changing to that of anger. "I should lose my teeth before you."

"Well, you should have said something, instead of saying the obvious!" Tuffnut raised a fist. "I said it first, I should lose my teeth first!"

"Uh, hey guys," I interrupted. "Can we move on?" Okay, maybe smashing my head into a rock was not the smartest thing to do but smarts were for hiccups, I am not a hiccup. Besides, I had something far better I wanted to do than listen to the twins fight, again.

"Oh." "Right." The twins went into a closet, heaving a storage chest out. I had been waiting for this moment for a whole week.

I hurriedly opened the crate, revealing a mess of brown, matted fur. I pulled out the articles of clothing. Inside was a tunic, a large pair of bracers thick enough to seem like paws, furred boots, and a cloak with hood using what was left of the bear's head. A bear was far larger than me, meaning that to make an outfit out of it, the tailor had to cut it up into several different articles in order to use it all. I had decided that if I was going to go show myself in the crowds tomorrow, I was going to make an impression; all bear combat gear was not something anyone forgot about.

I put on each of the pieces of my ensemble, relishing the new wardrobe. It was not every day I got an outfit made just for me, but

it was worth every coin. I turned and looked at myself in the mirror again, flexing my exposed biceps. I certainly looked good and I was planning on beating everyone wearing this. Was it just meâ€¦ or did my nose seem a bitâ€¦ bigger?

I was just imagining thingsâ€¦ I hoped.

Just then, I heard a knocking at the door. Tuffnut opened it, revealing a skinny blonde boy. "A customerâ€¦" he said, as he and everyone else turn their attention to the pile of discarded rocks I bashed my face into. "Uh the store's a mess right now, come again later!" Then, he forced the customer out the doorâ€¦

I saw Ruffnut get on the floor, broom in handâ€¦ using it on rocks. "Quick, we have to clean up! The boss does not need to see thisâ€¦"

"Yeah, if he doesâ€¦ we'll lose our axe next!"

"Now give me a hand." Tuffnut went near his sister and gave her a handâ€¦ literally; there was a wooden hands rack for the disabled. "Very funnyâ€¦"

"Well, I couldn't give you my handâ€¦ I am attached to it."

So the twins went to cleaning. The muttonheads seemed to be forgetting the fact that closing time happened hours ago and unless this guy couldn't read, he was obviously not a customer. Wellâ€¦ even I could readâ€¦

I went over to the door while the twins were distracted. Opening it, I found that the boy was still there. Hopefully he would not mind myâ€¦ appearance.

The blonde boy eyed me for a moment, an uncomfortable stare. I did not like that look. Eventually though, the stare stopped and the boy's expression turned to that of relief. "Ohâ€¦ finally someone who looks like they could help me." Or on the other hand, maybe he would think I looked helpfulâ€¦ for some reason. Well, I guess that was fine then.

"Uh, can I help you?"

"Yeahâ€¦" said the boy. "I have lost my other half."

"Oh," I said, turning to look back at the busy twins. Obviously this guy must have had family or a brother who looked just like him; I heard that some twins thought of each other as parts of each otherâ€¦ Though neither Tuffnut nor Ruffnut really did that.

"It's our first time beingâ€¦ apart. And I don't know where he is."

"You can't find him?" The boy nodded. Well, I at least understood what was going on. I remember the one time back when we were little kids when I had to help Tuff find his sisterâ€¦ who was at home the whole time while we searched the whole town, but that was beside the point. "So you don't have any idea where he could be?"

"We've never beenâ€¦ separated before."

"Well, don't you have a little idea of where he could be? Aren't there places you go where your brother doesn't?" For instanceâ€¦ Ruff and Tuff cannot share the same outhouse at the same time.

"No, never, before now."

I whistled in reply.â€¦ that was some serious dedication to the whole twin thing. "Well, I can't say that I've met him."

The boy gave a sigh and started to walk out the door. "Well, thanks anywaysâ€¦" And then he was gone.

With the boy gone, I turned my attention back to the store and the twins. â€¦ The store was suddenly squeaky clean, cleaner than when I had first walked in. Apparently, the twins swept the floor and polished the wood in the time I had my attention turned. The shelves and ceiling were dusted, with every cobweb swept up and put awayâ€¦ And the pile of rocks I had made was nowhere to be seen. Okay, they _really _wanted their yak back.

"Okay, now we can handle that customer."

"Send him in!"

"Too late guys," I saidâ€¦ just as we heard the door knocked upon again.

This time Ruff opened it, revealing to us a blonde boy, exactly identical to the one who we had just met. "Have you seen my other half?" he asked.

I pointed off in a direction down one of the streets. "Down that way," I said.

* * *

><p>Today was the day. At the caw of the first rooster, I led my son and his friend to the Kill Ring. There was no more time to train, no more time to prepare. He was equipped with everything I could give him both physically and mentally.<p>

My steps were heavy, but it seemed the two boys were more than ready for the events of today. I suppose the truth weighed me down a little. I did not tell Hiccup about the truth of this contest. The Tribal Council was fair reasonable when they accepted Gothi's request for this mad contest, we even went out of their way to add an amendment to the law stating that my son was still a Viking under the law. And over the past two weeks, other people had come to see that he was more or less the same boyâ€¦ just driven by something other than shooting down a Night Fury. It appears it's really easy to like someone when they aren't making miniature catapults. He was not going to be exiled for what he did; that was certain.

No, the real issue here is whether or not my son would be allowed to continue practicing sorcery. That was the reason I had made him so busy as to do nothing little else other than play games with Toothless every night. Beforeâ€¦ all this happened, it had come up fairly often that we should have banned Hiccup from practicing blacksmithing because he tended to cause injuries wherever he went

with his newfangled contraptions. Ironically only reason this measure repeatedly failed was because he was unqualified to do anything else, his own lack of physical ability protecting him.

But sorcery wasâ€¦ potentially even more dangerous than blacksmithing. Sorcerers were feared for a reason. Gothi, despite how many of the villagers looked up to her, they were also afraid of what would happen if she foretold doom for anyone. And she was just a diviner, a seer who had the power to peer through the future. When we had learned Hiccup started practicing sorcery, particular one that involved, of all things, transforming into a dragon, everyone, even me, feared things would get out of hand. The Council had almost practically decided to forbid my son from learning more and practicing it. Almost, if it were not for three things.

One. Alvin was still out there and currently only my son had the tools and knowledge to defeat him. He was too strong and too fast, for any of us to fight. Simply not having those arrows my son could make would prove to be disastrous.

Two. The potion itself granted tremendous physical improvement among other perks. Simply speaking, seemed far too useful to just simply ignore its existence. Only the side effects seemed to be an issueâ€¦ If that could be dealt with...

Three. It might have been the only thing that could ever get things back to normal, now that Hiccup had refused the only help we had.

The whole point of this exercise was to see if allowing Hiccup to practice sorcery would be worth it. If my son actually had become strong enough to beat three of his peers, when before he was no match for them, the Council would be very inclined allow him to continue his practice his strange arts. The prize of facing the Nightmare was just being used as a motivator to get the other students to partake in this mad quest. Only those who were on the Council or were close to it, like Gobber knew any of this.

Breaking from my thoughts, I found myself facing the familiar metal gates of the arena, dragons could not burn through cold iron. I stopped in front of the entrance to the Kill Ring, prompting my son to do the same.

Snotlout was already there, waiting for us. What I saw wasâ€¦ disconcerting. He was of course, dressed up in that silly bear get up he had been fawning over ever since he had seen the designs, but that was not what caught my attention. While the boy had gotten more and more reckless as of late, he had more or less stayed mostly the same other than a few patches easily hidden by tunic and some trousers. When I saw him todayâ€¦ his jaw wasâ€¦ deformed. Several of his teeth had grown into jagged edges. His mouth and nose hadâ€¦ fused slightly, forming a smallâ€¦ snout. I saw my brother, with a very displeased look at my nephew. "What happened?"

"The boy made a stupid mistake," he said, causing Snotlout to visibly squirm under his displeasure. "Can you believe it?" Unfortunately, I could. The boy was always too proud for his own good and this was definitely humiliating. He must have had some sort of face injury last night and it recovered.

I thankfully did not have to reply as Gobber showed up. "Ah, it seems the last two of our contestants arrived!" He wisely did not make any mention of Snotlout's condition in front of his father. "You boys both ready?"

"Hello Gobber," my son said in front of his teacher. "I'm ready!"

"and so am I!" said Snotlout, feeling somewhat unenthusiastic. I suppose having a face like that would be a mood killer even for him.

"Good," my friend said as he gestured for the boys to approach. The two of them looked at each other for only a moment. In the past week, I had trained them to work as a team. Despite this though, only one will be allowed to face the Nightmare. I did not know what message the silence conveyed, but I knew them well enough that they were going to do their best.

My son gave me a last minute look, awaiting for my approval. I gave it. "I wish you luck, my son." After all, no Viking had a tail except for my son.

Toothless, feeling supportive, added in, "Kick their tails," a figure of speech, no doubt.

My son gave a grin to both of us. He was ready. I made him ready. I did that.

Spitelout, my brother, was not feeling so supportive of his son. He said nothing. I did instead. "You, too, Snotlout. Do your best." Snotlout inhaled a deep breath, trying to squash the last minute stage fright caused by his transformation.

The metal gates opened and the two boys both walked inside, along with Gobber, the manager of this little fight.

I left the gates, leaving Toothless behind. Beside him, was a small gathering crowd of teenagers, peers of the combatants who participated in Dragon Training, but were not the best of their class. They were interested in seeing how this was all about to unfold. Never in the history of Berk has the Choosing ever been between members of their classes yet still also involved dragons! While he was not a student, Toothless was there to support Hiccup from the sidelines. I allowed him.

I climbed up a ladder onto the raised platforms that surrounded the Kill Ring. This was another safety measure; it was far easier to protect the audience if they had a height advantage to defend against the dragons. This was also on top of the specially prepared metallic dome made to prevent the dragons from fleeing; dragons were not able to use their claws to reach out against the villagers. We Vikings might have been brutish, but we were not stupid or wasteful of our lives.

I pushed several villagers out of my way as I strode towards my usual place opposite the gate where the students would have entered, one where I could oversee all of the action and properly address the whole of Berk. Gothi was already there, performing a silent vigil. I only got the faintest response to note that she had acknowledged my

existence before she turned towards the arena.

As soon as I went into my potion, Gobber gave the usual announcements, something to rile up the crowd and to dispense information. He announced the competitors in order they were appearing, most of them were boys that I was sure only he really had the time to know. Sorry, Goober, I tuned him out. See one Choosing, you've seen them all and I've seen all of them ever since I was a lad. Sure this one was important to me, but I could do without the boring introductions.

Behind me, someone else approached and spoke. I turned saw who it was. "Greetings, Chief Stoick. I hope you do not mind I watch this event, truly something we have never seen before will happen today." I almost wish I had forced my son to take up the man's offer when he gave it that day, but I was too dumbstruck to even realize what had happened until the merchant had already left my home. I still struggled to understand why my son was not willing to go to a foreign land without his new friend. He never explained why either, only coming up with excuses. Snotlout also refused, at the time convinced he was invincible. It would have been so much easier on me if they accepted his offer.

"Not at all Trader Alâ€¦ granted, you may wish to not speak about today for a while," I said. The political ramifications of my son practicing a very obscure and powerful form sorcery were not to be taken lightly. The potion, even as it was now, is a powerful military asset. That would tip the balance of power in the Archipelago, one way or another.

"And greetings to you, too, Elder Gothi," the merchant-sorcerer spoke. Gothi did not even seem to move, not even acknowledging she was spoken too. For some reason, I almost felt like there was ice crawling down my spine. Al did not seem to mind. This happened every time I had ever seen the elder meet someone she did not likeâ€¦ Gothi just really did not like Al for some reason, can't imagine why. The man was atleast better to talk to than Mildew.

There was an awkward silence that dawned from the lack of any response from the village elder. Because of that, I started paying attention to the Choosing once Gobber yelled the words. "â€¦ And finally, weighing in just over one hundred pounds, the first boy on Berk to grow scales, comes Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third!" I saw my son, approaching the center of the arena, sword in his right hand, shield in his left. Because of the strange changes my son had, he had put on some weight.

He was the last one in to get in position. Beside him stood Snotlout, still uncomfortable showing his face in front of the village, but he I could tell he was trying to put a veneer of confidence forward. He repeatedly juggled his hammer in the air while waiting for the fighting to begin.

Across from the two boys was a team of six with the Hofferson girl, Astrid, standing in front of the rest. Aside from her, four of them were boys and one was a girl. The others were not known to me, unfortunately; I had not spent any time teaching the class and had skipped through Gobber's introduction of them. Still, they made it this far, that had to count for something.

"Now fighters," Gobber addressed the combatants. "Are you ready?"

"I was born ready." I heard Snotlout speak.

Astrid just spat in the ground and eyed her two enemies, not even bothering to give a word.

"I'm ready, but I still think two-on-six is not a fair fight!" my son said.

"And neither is having the ability to grow back an arm and a leg." said Gobber as he made mention of his amputated limbs. My son just shrugged as Gobber made the last minute checks. The fighters, noted this and lifted their weapons and shields to fight. It was time. "Fight!" And so it was.

From my position, I could oversee the battle as it happened. I put my years of combat experience to good use as I saw each and every move and the reason behind it all. The rules were simple, fight until one dropped unconscious or gave up. Killing was not allowed and there were to be debts for any permanent and debilitating injuries suffered here.

Astrid, being the one with the most actual combat experience, relative to the others was sort of the leader for her team. Dragon Training was taught as a team effort, a form of combat suited to defeating foes much larger than the users. The Hofferson girl gave orders to surround the two boys, causing her team to approach the boys spread out. My son and my nephew realized what was happening and slowly backed away, their guards up. But they were encircled with little difficulty. This was a standard tactic, with the purely human fighters making use of their numerical advantage. There was little the two of boys could do other than have their backs against each other to have vision of all sides. I remember being on the receiving end of this trick more than once. It was annoying to keep track all your enemies when they surrounded you from all sides.

Once the boys were fully encircled, their enemies approached cautiously. My two students kept their cool, or tried to at any rate. And failed. Snotlout, decided to charge up at one other boys with a ferocious scream, hammer held high. He bashed his shield into the boy and sent him to the ground, breaking free of the trap. The two nearest fighters, the girl other than Astrid and another boy went into assist their downed teammate.

Meanwhile, Astrid and the two other boys, each armed with swords went after my son. My son barely had enough time to block and evade he repeated attempts to strike him the Hofferson girl gave him. Meanwhile, the two other boys kept trying to get behind him and repeatedly made attempts to strike at him.

Now the fighting was in two areas with my son on the defense, trying to survive the onslaught he was facing only barely. Snotlout meanwhile was on the offense, viewing the best defense was a solid offense. It was all a stalemate, for now. Being outflanked was always dreadfully scary, but this was bad. I had trained them to fight as a team and they were not. Snotlout's charge, while it broke himself, left my son in a very difficult position to defend himself. This was what I was talking about when I said not having the brains to be a great warrior.

The stalemate ended when Snotlout, finding that his hammer been knocked off by a successful shield bash had decided to retaliate using his fists. It broke through the wooden shield and stayed there. I could see him put great effort into trying to shake himself free from it, but ultimately he was stuck.

Taking this opportunity, the boy who owned said shield decided attack my nephew with a slice at his trapped wrist. Snotlout bled and the offending boy suddenly got himself flung back into a wall. Ouch, that had to hurt. The crowd went wild. Gobber, overseeing the whole thing from the ground ran over to the downed boy, "He's alive but he's going to feel that in the morning." Which was good, I'd like to avoid fatalities if we can, but it happened every now and again.

Snotlout, no longer seeing any way to get himself unstuck from the shield, decided to repeatedly pummel at with his own fists, thankfully not getting it trapped again; just in time for his backside to get stabbed by two swords, the downed boy's teammates, avenging their fallen. My cousin went down on the ground from the pain, but I knew he would soon recover, changed.

I could see that the two who had dispatched were hesitating to make their next move, but they prepared to strike again. Instead, they were interrupted by a shield that struck one of them, only to bounce off of him and strike the other. The shield landed harmlessly near my cousin. Hiccup, my son, who had used that shield to fend off the attacks of the girl he had a crush on had just thrown it and struck two of his peers with a single throw. I knew those lessons would "Take it, Snotlout! Take it!" he yelled, as he tried to escape his pursuers.

Snotlout, not hesitating picked up the shield Hiccup had discarded and used it as a brace to keep both of his enemies down. This time, my nephew was cautious enough to have kick the weapons the two used far enough away that they would be safely out of their reach. They were mostly down and out, but they were still struggling against Snotlout who seemed to be rather pleased with himself for holding them both to the ground. Thankfully, my cousin was not using his strength to break their bones, that would have been messy.

The crowd shifted attention to Hiccup, I could practically feel the bewilderment they had when they saw that my son was fighting off three of their best with nothing but a sword; I was in much the same state they were. Granted, fighting might have been stretching it, but what else would one call my son trying keep himself as far enough away from his enemies as possible while spouting off random complaints for how crazy this all was. Well, the only reason it really qualified as fighting was because my son was constantly parrying all of Astrid's exhaustion was starting to make each of the combatant's moves more desperate, more exhausting than the last. Hiccup might have healed from any wound, but he could not recover from any weariness.

The fight turned when Hiccup's attention was divided just long enough for the two boys Astrid had on her side to strike at Hiccup at the back. An sword dug itself into my son's back, providing the other boy an opportunity to disarm my son. My son's sword dropped from the pain, but not before doing the same to his attacker; that boy was not going to be using his sword arm for a while. My son however would

likely recover the use of his arm within the minuteâ€¦ if the battle went long enough, that would be an advantage.

Still, my son went face first into the ground when, Astrid, spotted the opportunity. "It's over, Hiccup," Astrid said as she held her axe above my son, not ready to strike, but in a position where she could threaten to attack. Her tone was confident, proud. "You did good, but not good enough."

Hiccup, though defeated, did not sound it. "One versus three, way better than I thought I'd ever beat."

"Still, I enjoyed myself. I would have wanted it to be one-on-one, but I guess maybe we can do that on our own timeâ€¦"

"I did, too," my son laughed. Why was my son sounding so â€¦ confident? Sure, Snotlout was still on the field enjoying himself as he kept his opponents pinned, but my son practically out of it. Shouldn't he at least be a little upset that he lost?

It seems even the Hofferson girl picked up on that. "You know, for someone who just got defeated, you sure sound pretty upbeatâ€¦"

"Well, that's because I haven't lostâ€¦" In a flash, Astrid's axe suddenly left her hand and flown several feet out her hands. It took me only a second to spot that my son, in lieu of any other weapon, had decided to use his tail to disarm his crush. _His tail._ The same tail he had hated ever since he got. Astrid and her cohorts appeared to be stunned at what just happened, like everyone else did. No one had expected that to happen.

And no one expected that Astrid would suddenly be sent tumbling to the ground as _Hiccup_ used that same tail to grab on the stunned girl's leg with a pull and twisting of his body. Astrid, breaking free from her surprise, broke her fall and then tried to get herself back up into fighting position, the surprise wearing off the moment she hit the floor. She did not have the chance to stand. Hiccup, using his momentum, quickly went to his sword and grabbed it. His right arm had enough time to recover, bringing it to full working condition, although I think it might have been completely covered in scale by now.

All Hiccup did then do then was to place his sword close enough to strike Astrid. She put up her hands in surrender when she realized what had happenedâ€¦ "You beat meâ€¦"

"Well, you kind of gave me enough time to do thatâ€¦" my son said nonchalantly. "Erâ€¦ sorry about thatâ€¦" I could see he was afraid of making her upset.

Instead, Astrid just laughed. "You beat meâ€¦ You really beat meâ€¦ I never thought you'd do thatâ€¦"

"Good, because neither did I." The two kids just laughed.

I could see the two other boys near Astrid were considering to attack my son, planning to use the opportunity to strikeâ€¦ only for Snotlout to show up after Gobber declared the other two combatants on the other side of the Kill Ring to be defeated after having been

pinned for a minute. The two remaining boys just dropped their weapons without a fight now that the lost both the numerical advantage and their leader.

"Wellâ€¦ that was not what I was expecting," I heard Gobber say. "But okayâ€¦" The crowd cheered with everything they had, now that the fighting had stopped. This was definitely the weirdest conclusion they had ever seen; the worst Viking Berk had ever seen had just defeat the best. Well, I guess that tail had to be good for something.

Gothi however would have none of that. She tapped her staff several times into the ground; she wanted everyone's attention. I gave it to her by getting everyone else's. "Okay, quiet down. The elder has decided," I said.

Snotlout and Hiccup both stepped forward, both feeling rather proud of themselves tonight. It was not every day they won a fight and won great honor and glory. But still only one of them was going to be fighting the Nightmare and Elder Gothi seemed to have already decided. I think I knew who it was.

Gobber raised his hooked hand over Snotlout, there was some cheering but Gothi shook her head in disapproval. Obviously, due to the fact Snotlout relied too much on his muscle instead of his head to win. He definitely well in defeating his enemies, but he just simply overpowered them.

My best friend then lifted his hook over Hiccup. The crowd went wild and Gothi seemed to approve. Hiccup learned the lessons I gave him well. He had a solid defense and assisted his teammate even though Snotlout abandoned by him. He also took down Astrid by himself, using unexpected tactics. He was definitely the crowd favorite this time.

Only Snotlout seemed to disapprove, but he gave a his cousin a few claps anyways.

"You've done it! You've done it, Hiccup! You get to kill the dragon!" Cheered Gobber. Back when my son was born, I had dreamed of this day coming. When I learned Hiccup was always going to be a weakling when he was a very young boy, those dreams were dashed beyond hope of repairâ€¦ it seemed I should have held a bit longer to those dreams.

"Uh â€¦ yeahâ€¦" said my son. Just then, the gates of the Kill Ring opened, allowing the teenagers who found the chance to leave. Toothless, I saw, went over to my son and that Hofferson girl. All of them seemed rather thrilled, though Hiccup did not seem as excited as I thought he would be. This was the highest honor any boy his age could achieve, afterall. But then again, my son was always a little different.

Gothi and the others left, moving on to follow my son, a new celebrity in the making. He might have been a bit freaky now, but none can deny his newfound prowess. I stayed behind at the ring, I left him alone. He had his friend to attend to and I just know he wants to share his thoughts and feelings with them. I would see him back home anyways. Besides, someone had to oversee cleanup duty, especially since tomorrow was going to be an even better day. I

wanted it to be an even better day.

I was not the only one who stayed behind. Trader Al, followed me as I directed a few laborers to clean up any garbage or refuse that was leftover by the now-gone villagers. "That wasâ€¦ fascinatingâ€¦" said the merchant.

"Yeah, I never thought I was going to ever see my son fight in the _Choosing_ and then win it," I beamed with excitement. I was proud of my son.

"That trick he did with the tail wasâ€¦ interesting, too, don't you think?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I've seen some dragons use that trick before, but never would I have thought my son would learn how to do that." One of the most frightening things a Viking would experience is being disarmed by a dragon. For some reason, some dragons, mostly Nadders, knew this trick where they could flick their tails to disarm a Viking. It would have been covered under the normal Dragon Training curriculum if we could reliably find dragons that knew it, but unfortunately, that was not the case. We only told stories about it and possible defenses to prevent such an event from happening.

"Where do you suppose he learned how to do that?" Trader Al asked.

"No idea," I said truthfully as I walked by the gates that led to the dragon holding pens. I walked inside and ordered a few men to ensure the Nightmare was ready for tomorrow. I wanted my son to show all of Berk all of his glory. It had to be properly fed and watered. Trader Al seemed to flinch a little as he approached it. The Nightmare seemed to take special notice of him as he walked by. Nothing happened other than it growling a little. "You scared?"

"Erâ€¦ yes." He admitted. "Not exactly a big fan of Nightmaresâ€¦"

I nodded and we walked away from the Nightmare. Al gave the beast one last look before it was out of sight, he must have wanted to be sure that it was locked up properly in its cage. "That should be better."

"Yes," he said.

"I can hardly wait for tomorrowâ€¦" I muttered. "My son is going to be fighting that beasties."

"Yes, neither can I," agreed Trader Al.

* * *

><p>All martial arts start with the basics. For dragons, I imagine using the tail was the most universal thing they would all learn because they all have tails that can be used for most of the same tasks. This chapter reflects that.

And yes, Toothless is developing a fear of the dark. Pretty ironic right?

Some of you may have already guessed that Trader Al is a dragon in human form as is the rest of his crew. So, I will state that it is beyond a doubt that that guess is correct. Not only that, but the teenagers aboard his crew are people we know from the show. It should be obvious who they are.

Oh and only Hiccup really knows about the King. Not everyone shares information.

Some of you might have been wondering on why I decided to put so much emphasis on the Choosing. For me, it was because I realize it's a pivotal point. It's where a lot of pieces really start to come together. The next chapter and the one after it will really show what I mean.

Astute readers will notice Hiccup is using his right arm in the fight, despite being left handed. Neither he nor his father really ever focused on the left, his actual primary hand, during the time. Remember, left hands are cursed at this time in history.

Astrid is obviously not reacting the way she did when Hiccup when he subdued Meatlug in the Choosing canon had. She has warmed up a little to Hiccup instead of spending time resenting him for his success.

14. Chapter 14

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Shortish chapter, but packed with action. Please remember to read and review.

* * *

><p>Night had fallen upon Berk. Today I had seen my son do what was once impossible; He had become the champion of the Choosing and was slated to face the Nightmare in the Proving..Because my son practiced sorcery that gave him an advantage, the worst Viking of Berk was able to face the best, six of the best, young Vikings Berk had with the only assistance being his cousin and win. Suddenly it was if all of my parenting troubles were going to be over; with one successful disarm and takedown maneuver, my son was a crowd favorite, an instant celebrity. He might have looked a bit different, but well, many Vikings had disfigurements; his scaly growths and legs and tail were just a new kind of disfigurement, right?

But none of that stopped me from worrying. I had mostly given my son training to deal with human opponents, I had no idea what he was going to do tomorrow. A dragon was a very different opponent with its own strengths and weaknesses, sure a disarming move against a human was very good, but it was a different thing to disarm claws. I gave him some lessons on human opponents and the whole goal of the exercises I put him through were as close to fighting dragons without actually fighting dragons. But simulations only go so far, a real dragon was a vicious killer, a beast with cunning and full of savagery.

And that was not even dealing with the whole sorcery issue. Because

of his performance in the Kill Ring, I had next to know doubt that my son would be allowed to practice sorcery. Everyone knew how weak he was before, but nowâ€¦ I think some people were actually wanting to learn about his methods. Let's be honest, when Snotlout started breaking rocks barehanded and apparently barefaced, people were really wondering what Hiccup's potion could do for them, even considering the side effects. But learning sorcery was dangerous. His first mistake with it cost him much of his humanity; his next might cost him his life.

I just took a drink. Mead went down my throat and hit my stomach like a rock. I sat in the Great Hall along with some friends of mine; Gobber, of course, and the addition of some fishermen named Bucket and Mulch. We all ate and exchanged a few words. Pleasantries, those Romans believe we know nothing about them.

The place was packed tonight, more so than usual. Everyone was gossiping about him. I looked over at a table at the far corners of the Hall, the usual place my son sat. While Hiccup and Toothless sat there, as always, tonight, he was accompanied by that Hofferson girl, Snotlout, and an assortment of variousâ€¦ fans. It was strange, almost alien to see that Hiccup, of all people, was now gathering a following that really should not have been able to fit on a single table. It was clear on their faces they were not enjoying the extra company. Though, I imagine Snotlout was only there because my son was the champion.

I could not hear what my boy and his friends were discussing, not over what everyone else was saying. My son was the talk of the town, yet again. Though the usual complaints about him were drowned out by his recent victories. He broke apart a fortress while held captive, gave food and furs to the poor, next he defeated his own peers; what sort of adventures await him in the future?

"Told you he'd be fine," said Gobber, after downing a full serving of mead from his usual cup-hand. "Just didn't see him... well, you know." Obviously, referring to the magic and dragon transformations. Of course everyone knew that.

I downed another pint of mead and wiped my beard. "I'm just worried about tomorrow is all. That Nightmare might tear him apart for all I know." I was excited when I was given confirmation, but now that I had time to cool down from the emotional high, there was a lingering feeling of dread in my stomach.

"Oh, don't worry about, that Nightmare is probably the laziest I've ever seen. I don't think he's going to give him much of a fight," consoled my friend. I did not know whether or not I was glad or upset he was fighting a subpar challenge. On the one hand, I wanted him to survive, on the other, I did not want him to go untested. "Besides he faced Alvin. That man was more dangerous than any Nightmare even before he grew steel tearing clawsâ€¦"

I nodded. Alvin was always a freak, a dangerous freak. I was glad we exiled him all those years ago before he could have done even more harm. "And well, the whole sorcery thing."

"I'm sure he'll figure it outâ€¦" said Gobber. "You know how he likes to tinker with everything."

"That's precisely what has me worriedâ€¦" I muttered. A part of me wishes forget all of the havoc my son could cause if given the opportunity. When he just had ordinary crafting to deal with, his 'tinkering' often resulted in bruises and broken bones. With sorcery, who knew what would happen? That kind of power was feared for a reason. One thing was for sure, I was going to see if Gothi could teach him about this stuff.

"Well, it's not like he's playing with fireâ€¦"

"He's part dragonâ€¦ sooner or later, I imagine he'll start burning down houses when he sneezes." I could only hope it never went that after.

"You need to relax, Stoick," said Gobber as he poured more mead into my cup. Maybe he was right. A few more drinks might help me think more clearly, more free of doubts. I drank it, all of it. I wasn't worried about getting drunk; I was used to mead and I was fairly large. I was nowhere near my limit, but a good cup of mead always helped loosened the nerves.

"Thank you," I said. Gobber couldn't help but give a warm smileâ€¦ and another cup. I drank it, but not before asking a question. "What do you think my son would do with his potion, Gobber?" It was the cause of all this madness, I could only hope for a cure. I hoped my son would pursue that. I was thankful that my son had gotten respect because of it, but I _still _wanted him to be my son again.

"I don't know," admitted my friend. "Maybe he can figure out how to make it without causing people to grow scales all over." That would be great, I nodded. All of the benefit, without the drawback. Vikings that could heal from what seemed to be most injuries on top of the strength increase. Gobber then looked at his cup-hand apparatus with a frown. "In fact, I wonder if he could rig it up so that I could grow back an arm." I just gave my friend a tense look. He had lived for most of his life with fake limbs, and now he was considering on getting a new arm? "Hey, you try living for two decades with a hook for a hand. It's not as easy as it looks."

"Oh yeah," said Mulch, finishing a loaf of bread. "Bucket could finally think straight if that happened."

"But what about my painting?" said the man with a bucket covering his head injury. "Would I be able to paint, after that?"

I just gave them a grin. Maybe it was the mead getting to me. If only the potion worked like that, that would have made my life so much easier. For now though, I resolved to keep the purpose of the Choosing a secret; he did not have time to worry about sorcery, not when glory and honor were almost in his grasp.

* * *

><p>For ten years, the Proving had always been my destiny, my one big chance to won honor and glory for my clan. I believed I was destined for greatness, though I lacked the strength the boys all possessed, my skill was beyond equal. With my axe, I would have redeemed my uncle's defeat and cleared his name. And over the years, everyone, including myself, believed that it was certain. My path was set, my goal was clear. All I had to do was train and prepare for my inevitable clash

with the Nightmare.<p>

Except that would never happen. My uncle's axe was now in tatters, its final resting place on a wall somewhere, not serving as a weapon; I was bested in combat, by an opponent who should have been weaker than me, yet had defeated me with, what was in retrospect, a simple disarming move; worst of all, I was not going to fight the Nightmare, the one who defeated me having taken my place. And in spite of all that, I was not angry at him.

Hiccup, when one really thought of it, was the source of all my recent troubles. I was only on Outcast Island to lose my axe because I accepted his deals and I only lost to him because I encouraged him to fight. I should have been angry at him for taking what was mine what was mine, yet I couldn't. He won, fair and square, even when the odds were stacked against him. Sure, the potion gave him some advantages, but it was still a fairly one-sided afraid until he managed to disarm me.

I looked at that boy now. Hiccup was frantically running around his house, in a panic. Toothless, Fishlegs, and I could only watch him as he was fanatically trying to find something. It was clear for all of us to see why considering the fact he was without a tunic. Hiccup finally stopped once he had drawn a small pocket mirror hidden in one of the tables and likely had a small glimpse of what of what we saw. "I have wings," he said. Those triangular black growths moved as he inspected them, responding to their owner. "And just when I was getting used to the tail."

I gave him a small chuckle. "Well, you did beat me with it, last night." It must have been the back injury, the sword wound he received that caused it. The other reason I found it hard to hate Hiccup for beating me was becauseâ€¦ I felt that he still lost in that battle. I did not have to go through any sort of crisis every time my body had so much as a scratch. It must have been quite a shocker when he woke up with those protrusions sticking out of his back.

"Don't remind me," the boy replied, a groan in his voice. "I'm regretting beating you alreadyâ€¦"

"You'll get used to the fanclub eventually," I said. As someone who had at least four years withâ€¦ admirers, I had experience at ignoring them. Most especially the boys, though sometimes, they really were difficult to ignore. The gifts were handy every now and again, but sometimes it was annoying when I wanted to be alone. I imagine last night must have been Hiccup's first experience with people constantly seeking his attention. Now he knew what I had to put up every single day.

"You know those wings of yours areâ€¦ pretty small," commented Toothless as he inspected Hiccup's wings. "A Night Fury's are each the length of his body. Those things barely reach the length of your elbows. I don't see how you'll catch enough wind to fly with them." Now that I thought about it, those wings were incredibly small in comparison to his body side. Gronckles were the only dragons with wings like that and only Odin knew how they managed to fly.

Hiccup sighed in response. "So I guess flying lessons are out of the question for now?" Flying lessons? I looked over at Fishlegs who was

taking notes, mostly for documenting Hiccup's progression. The larger boy just gave me a shrug, he didn't have a clue either. Hiccup picked up on this and explained for us, "Wellâ€¦ Toothless has been showing me some dragony things, like swimming and tail fightingâ€¦"

At that point, I looked over at Toothless, who recoiled slightly at my gaze. "So you're the reason I lost," I said. It did not take me long for me to put together the source of Hiccup's disarming maneuver. I can't believe I did not realize it before. Duh, he was a dragon, where else would Hiccup learn to fight using a dragon's limbs?

"Uh, yeah, about thatâ€¦" I didn't give him time to finish.

I might have made Hiccup an exception to my wrath in light of his condition, but Toothless did not have any such protections. Besides, I was not going to hurt himâ€¦ much. I stepped on his foot. "That was for teaching him." Then I promptly yanked said foot with my other, knocking him to the floor. "And that was for everything else."

Toothless gave a groan as he tried to stand himself up. "I thought we were friendsâ€¦" For a moment, I considered that... maybe we were friends. He was trustworthy. I've made concessions to him already, what was one more?

"That's how Astrid treats her friends," filled in Hiccup. "You should see how she is with Ruffnut." I smiled. He was learning. There was definitely hope for him after all.

"How come you don't get pummeled?" Asked Toothless to his best friend.

"I have special treatment, apparently," was the response. Yes, definitely not an idiotâ€¦ though still very capable of stupid mistakes.

Defeated, Toothless stood up and gave a grunt of resignation. "I will never understand femalesâ€¦" He muttered under his breath. Female, female, female. Why was there a nagging suspicion in the back of my head? It was probably nothing. Really, it was just odd why Toothless seldom referred to people by their gender, rather other things. Was it just a dragon thing? But I did not have time to think about that for long, Toothless changed the topic, "Say, Hiccup, you ready for today?"

"No," Hiccup responded. "My 'fans' gave me no time to prepare at all last night."

Suddenly, I remembered the reason why I had come over to Hiccup's house in the first place. I had just been side tracked by Hiccup's frantic mirror search and the whole discussion about his wings. I had to speak to him about the Proving. Now that the topic was the right one, I only had to speak about it. "Soâ€¦ what are you going to do about the Nightmare?"

"What?" said Hiccup, bewildered for a moment. Currently, Fishlegs was doing some measurements over the boy's wings.

"You have to fight the Nightmare," I reminded him. Honestly, he had

brought up two weeks ago that dragons were essentially like us and yet here he was, going out of his way to make sure he was going to fight it. What went on in that twisted little mind of his?

Hiccup sighed for a moment, tense. I saw him trying to think of the right words to say, the right counter argument. "I don't have to," he said finally.

"What are you talking about?" my response was harsh, but what else could I do? I stared at him for a moment. It was my turn to be confused. Did he just beat me just so he could not fight a dragon? If that was the case, Snotlout would probably be the next in line and he had no qualms about slaying a dragon. I just gave a glance at Toothless and Fishlegs, they too had no idea what Hiccup meant.

"I have to show them," he said. "Toothless, I know this is asking for much, but I need you to make those arrows for me. I'll try to delay them while you get to work." And then everyone of us got it. He was going to use those arrows and turn the Nightmare into a human being. That would be the greatest shock that any Viking could ever see. I should know. While they had seen one of their own changing into what they saw was a foul beast, I don't think many would even consider the possibility of that happening in reverse. Then again, Hiccup always somehow managed to defy expectations. I should start expecting the impossible from him all the time.

"But Hiccup," said Fishlegs, finally speaking. "Are you sure that that would work? Camicazi said she couldn't make neither the potion or the arrows work right, what makes you think the arrows Toothless had made would work?" This was new to me, but then again, I was busy for past two weeks. I did not know Hiccup had asked Camicazi to attempt to use sorcery as well, nor did I know those attempts ended in failure. Granted, if I knew her, and I did, she probably stole the recipes when we were not looking.

"I don't exactly have much time now," said Hiccup. And he was right, it was an hour, maybe two at most, before the Proving would begin and most of our time until would have to be spent just walking to the Kill Ring. I did not know much about blacksmithing, but I imagine that making the arrows was probably time consuming enough we could not do it within the hour. If only Hiccup did not have fansâ€¦

I turned to Toothless, who had a stake in this; If Hiccup was successful, it wouldn't be long before people started to figure out that Toothless was a dragon. No one knew what island he came from, or his parents, or really, anything at all about his life before Berk. That right there was a perfect target for any suspicions that could be levied. His only defense was the fact that Vikings were completely ignorant of how origins. His safety would be at risk. That and because I remembered he made me the arrows Hiccup needed. He probably remembered them, but was just not bringing it up because it was my possession. "So what do you think about this?"

The black hair boy contemplated it for a moment. He knew what was going to happen once Hiccup did his mad plan. And the consequences. "I can'tâ€¦ lie like this forever. " he said. "I like being human, I really do. I like using my hands to work, the food, the warm beds, clothing, all the little thingsâ€¦ but I'm a dragon. It's what I am. It's what I should be..." This all really surprised me, surprised all of us. While most of us had been focusing on Hiccup's slowly growing

inhumanity, we had barely even considered that Toothless was essentially alone in a world full of humans with his only option was to blend in. I struggled to imagine the things he was feeling. "After Hiccup does his thing, I'll tell Chief Stoick myself. I can't lie to him anymore about that."

Hiccup went over to his friend, to console him. "It's alright, bud. But if this worksâ€¦ we can finally start working on our plans."

"Right," Toothless muttered. I did not know what those plans were, but if they were anything like this, they must have been insane by a normal person's standards.

"So, again, what exactly does turning a dragon into a human accomplish?" asked Fishlegs. That too, I started to wonder. While Hiccup's plan was definitely going to land a major shock on everyone who saw it, no one could really be sure on what was to happen. Most likely, the Vikings in charge of maintaining the Kill Ring would try to apprehend the resulting person and question him. And there was no telling how the _dragon _would react.

"People will start to see dragons are more than mindless beasts," said Hiccup. I was still puzzled, but the boy's further explanation gave me the answers I needed. "We, Vikings."

"And dragons, too," interrupted Toothless.

"See the other as just animals," Hiccup continued. "We can't even communicate to each otherâ€¦ I want to change thatâ€¦ Put an end to this." And there it was. Hiccup was going to do to all of Berk the same thing that had happened to me. When I first met Toothless, I saw a dragon, I didn't trust him. Even though he was speaking, he was just another animalâ€¦ Then he started to learn human things, reading, smithing, things no animal should be capable of learning. It wasn't until I realized he knew about things like honor and guilt that I really started to see him asâ€¦ just another boy. And Hiccup hopes the same would happen to all of Berk.

What an utterly insane and completely delusional planâ€¦ Those boys were really mad. "Alright, Hiccup, I'll help you." And I was probably just as crazed as they were for agreeing to help them.

"Uh, you will?" Hiccup said confused. "Astrid, how will you do that?"

Toothless gave me a questioning look, seeking a response for an unspoken question. I nodded. That was all the response he needed. "Yeah, I made Astrid some arrows so that we could try and hunt Alvin later."

"You did?" questioned Hiccup.

"Yes, he did," I confirmed. "Just promise me it won't go wrong."

"Well, that's oddly convenientâ€¦" muttered Hiccup. "But alright."

I gave him a curt grin. It was fortunate he needed them at this time. Besides, it wasn't as though Toothless or Hiccup couldn't make more

of them. When it came time to slay Alvin, I was expecting those two to pack a whole armory while they were at it. "I'll just stop by home and pick them up."

"But what if the arrows don't work?" asked Fishlegs.

"Then I run," said Hiccup. "And scream like a little girl."

I took offense to that. Boys always liked to make that comparison when ever they ran scared. I decided to correct that. "For the record, when I scream, things run away," I scolded him.

* * *

><p>After Astrid left to get her things, I went with Toothless and Hiccup the Kill Ring, the later managing to hide his wings underneath his tunic and the former's jacket. I stood next to them, right outside the gates of the Kill Ring, surrounded by hordes of Vikings, all faced one man. Hiccup's father stood atop a podium, addressing the crowd. When we had arrived, he was already speaking. "â€|I would've tied him to a mast and shipped him off for fear he'd gone mad. Yes! And you know it! But here we are. And no one's more surprised..."<p>

"Oh hear, we go," I heard Hiccup mutter.

"... or more proud than I am. Today, my boy becomes a Viking, even with his dragon scales. TODAY, HE BECOMES ONE OF US!" The crowd erupted into a loud cheer. Thank Thor that no one was really interested in us for the moment.

"You okay?" I asked him.

"I'm alright, Fishlegs." He replied. "I just hope dad understands what I'm trying to do."

"Well, I wouldn't object to having another of my Kin see humans in a different lightâ€|" said Toothless. I concurred with a nod. I've always been fascinated by dragons, that's why I read the Book of Dragons and learned everything I could about the matter, till I eventually started quoting statistics when I was twelve. Likewise, I had always dreamed about what it would be like to be able to talk to dragons, have a conversation. When I met Toothless and learned that dragons had their own society, their own culture, suddenly those dreams seemed to be a little less farfetched. Another dragon to talk to, another to ask questions, with his or her own perspective would be incredible.

"Oh, there he is," said a voice as it approached us. It was Snotlout, followed by Ruffnut and Tuffnut. "How's my favorite cousin?" Ever since yesterday, he'd been trying to get close to Hiccup. Even I could see it was mostly it was just him trying to take advantage of Hiccup's overnight popularity than anything else.

"I'm your only cousinâ€|" said Hiccup dryly.

I didn't pay attention to the rest of the conversation. There was maybe fifteen minutes before the fight was going to begin and I probably had better things I could be doing with my time, like reading a book or adjusting the statistics on all dragon entries. I

mean come on, they had to at least be at least as smart as us Vikings. I decided to just stare out into the distance.

Just then, I spotted that girl I met a few days back. She was dressed in the exact same attire that she wore that day. It was not an odd coincidence since clothes tended to be washed and ready to use every few days depending upon how much one laundries. She was followed by a few others, a pair of boys who looked exactly the same, a red haired girl, andâ€¦ Trader Al. Well, that explained why I hadn't met her before; she was a foreigner. I had been told there were plenty of people visiting from overseas.

"So, you looking forward to Thawfest?" said Snotlout, for the brief moment I decided to pay attention to his rambling. "I hope they add dragon eventsâ€¦ Maybe we can breathe fireâ€¦"

I interrupted him, "That's great Snotlout." I was not really paying attention, to his words. "I'll catch you guys later. Hiccup and Toothless just gave a shrug. They did not really need me after all; all they had to do was wait for Astrid.

I decided to follow the girl. I only barely knew her, I didn't even know her name. She and I only had a night's worth of time to play a little game and that just was not enough. I just hope her friends were not going to mind if I tagged along for a bit.

I followed the group as they walked around the area of the Kill Ring. I could only barely catch up to them as they quickly made their way to where ever it was they wanted to go. A tried to call out to them, but shouting "hello!" in a group of chatting Vikings was not something that was easy to do. They didn't even notice me as they went down to this dark place, underneath the stands and out of veiw of the crowd.

I was panting, hiding being a wooden column. Trying to keep up with the group was not fun, not in the least. I stood there for a moment, to catch my breath, I would introduce myself once things have happened. But at this distance, I could overhear them when they started speak amongst themselves.

"We shouldn't be here," said the red head, clutching a necklace that hung around her neck. "We couldn't find him, our noses areâ€¦ blind to scent while in these forms. Not to mention having to deal with the Herd." 'Herd'? Were they talking about the yaks? And what was this about forms.

"Yeah, my other half-" said one of the twins, his eyes paying attention to his double.

"-And my other half-" added the other boy.

"-Wish to be reunited-"

"-With the ourselves."

"Wellâ€¦" said the brunette girl I knew, "It wasn't all badâ€¦" I could imagine her face turning a tinge red.

Trader Al gave a sigh. "This is why our King should never have tasked me to send Squires, mere hatchlings. You four are simply too young to

deal with this world. You are not ready for this."

"We never asked for this," said the redhead. "We hardly knew him, yet our King believed that sending us was necessary. You, after all, do not know his scent."

"In a situation where we lack the finer things in life," muttered Al. "But I suppose under the current circumstances, it is fortunate you are so young; younglings are easily trusted. The Herd will not suspect you of deception."

Hatchlings? Squire? Their terms were all weird as so was their wordings. I mean the twins were talking about something clearly out of the ordinary. And how was this girl I knew involved? They all sounded like Toothless when we first met. And they were planning something. But if that was the case, then that meant they were I decided to stick around a bit longer. I need to know more. I was probably just leaping to conclusions, right?

"Our first objective may have failed, due to our inability to find him, but as Flight Commander," said Trader Al, using a term I heard Toothless used to once describe the leaders of dragon society. That was all I needed to know to know that Trader Al, all of these other teenagers, maybe even his crew members, were all dragons. And he hid that from us for ten years... "I have decided that our mission has changed for now. We must secure the Chief's son and we must do so today. It is fortunate that one of our own has the perfect opportunity to apprehend the boy without causing undue suspicion to ourselves."

I flinched a little, barely able to suppress a gasp. They were going to go kidnap Hiccup but who was Al talking about? "_Him?_" scoffed the redhead. Apparently she did not like whoever he was. "He may be of One Eye's Brood and a Squire like ourselves, but he has already failed us by getting himself captured. He was always such a lazy bones and very careless."

"Then he has the perfect opportunity to redeem himself," countered Al. "All he needs is the orders and some assistance. I will provide him those things."

"Uh, how?" said the twins in unison. It was creepy how they seemed to use the exact tone and timing.

Trader Al gave a small laugh. "All you must do is deliver me, to him. I will handle the rest." I then saw the merchant pull a ring off of one of his fingers and suddenly Trader Al just disappeared. Just Trader Al, his clothes remained behind, giving a faint outline of his shape before crumpling inwards in a heap. Something rustled beneath the garments and out came a small terror. That definitely confirmed it. They were all dragons.

The terror barked something that must have been an order which then caused the red haired girl to bend downwards and scoop up the little dragon.

I had to get out of here. Hiccup had to know something was going to go wrong. In fact, even Chief Stoick had to learn about this. I mean, sure I get what Hiccup is trying to do, but it was plainly clear that some dragons have been deceiving us for at least a decade. I didn't

get very far, before I felt something grab on to my legs. I landed flat on my chest with a small cloud of dust forming where I lay. I turned and found what had ensnared my legs. It was the two boys.

"You're not-,"

"-going anywhere."

"He knows too much," said the redhead, approaching me. "We have to silence him."

"No, we shouldn't." The brunette girl approached me, I could imagine fear in her eyes. I meanâ€¦ she was a dragon after all, underneath that disguise, but I could almost swear that she did not want me to die. "He is no threat to us."

"Why are you so trusting of one of the Herd?" the redhead asked the brunette. This must have what Hiccup meant when he said dragons thought of us as animals.

"He's not a bad male," said the brunette girl. "He shouldn't have to die."

The terror that had been Al chittered something, causing the redhead to back away. Apparently, they could understand still their native tongue, even when they cannot speak it. I guess that must have been an effect of the transformation. I wonder how that all worked. Sorcery, interesting enough to distract me when I was likely going to die.

"Well, what do you suppose we do?" said the red head to the others.

Al said something in that strange tounge of his."

"Oh-" said one of the twins.

The other continued. "-is that all?" Both of them had grins on their faces, I did not like that.

The red haired girl squinted her eyes at me, "Well, I guess that will doâ€¦"

"I am sorry I have to do this," said the brunette as she approached me. "Don't worry, you'll liveâ€¦"

"He's not like us," said the redhead. "And it's dangerous to let him live."

"No one will believe him, we'll make sure of that," said the brunette. "We will be dismissed as only a story, a mad dream once he awakes."

I might have been the strongest boy on the island, mostly due to puberty hitting me harder than everyone else. I was not always like that, having been one of the scrawniest kids in my age group when growing up. As a result, I never reallyâ€¦ learned how to use that strength to fight back. This I realized cost me right now. I couldn't defend myself as I was pinned to the ground. This was so familiar,

like I was suddenly being beaten by Outcast warriors once again. And thenâ€ the twins hit me in the face withâ€ somethingâ€ And only blackness remained.

* * *

><p>Fish didn't return. Not that I could blame him, I did not want to be here either. I had to, that was for sure, but if I saw another way, I would let Snotlout step through those gates. Toothless was busy, looking over a variety of weapons organized in a pile. He was interested in learning blacksmithing a bit further by studying the different sorts of weapons we Vikings made.<p>

I could see Gobber was making the final preparations for the Proving, overseeing the laborers as they secured the locks, ensuring the dragons were in their cages, ect. Apparently one of the Terrors slipped out, the little dragon, attached to the arm of a redhaired girl. I saw my teacher, forcefully take the dragon off the girl and put it in a small cage. "Okay, you can get yourself killed next year," he said as he took the small dragon away.

Currently, my Nightmare faced cousin was recounting some of ourâ€ shared childhood memories to pass the time. Most of them involved pranks that he pulled on me, that scared me or troubled me at the time. But now that I was older, I could look at them and see how silly some of those were. It wasâ€ oddly funny hearing about the time I was stuck up a tree from Snotlout's perspective, especially since he wasn't being mean about it and often he ended up depreciating himself. He stopped abruptly as I overheard him tell a story involving rotten cheese, not much explanation needed. His jaw was held open and I only had to guess who he was looking at.

Astrid came running by and not a moment too soon; the Proving was about to start and I needed Toothless's arrows. She carried a wooden box with, no doubt a case meant to hold the arrows; arrows, despite their lethality could be very fragile would proper care. "Sorry I'm late, Hiccup." said Astrid, between paths of breath. "Almost forgot where I placed them." She was covered in sweat. The shield maiden in training must have run back

"That's fine," I said. She handed me the box, allowing me to open it. Sure enough there were three silver tipped, run inscribed arrows inside the box. They were actual arrows, too, exactly as described in the book, so I couldn't fire them in a crossbow. The instructions in the book, were specifically for arrows. Because I lacked the ability to pull a bowstring at the time, I had to take some artistic liberties, when I made the arrows that downed Toothless. Hopefully, those liberties were not the reason I turned Toothless human. "Perfect," I said once I was finished. Thankfully, I had that hunting bow dad gave me.

"Oh, you plan to defeating the Nightmare with Archery?" said Snotlout, as he addressed a small crowd of fellow teenagers, some of them were students in Dragon Training. "I always told you guys my cousin does crazy stuff all the time." That sentence could be interpreted many different ways, but I couldn't help but agree. No matter what I was planning to do in that arena, it could only be described as utter lunacy.

"Yeahâ€ with only one arrow," I added as I took only a single arrow,

having the rest back to Astrid. That caused Snotlout to grin a little, approving. It was definitely better to have my cousin on my side than against me. "You won't believe what I'll be doing today." Besides, I only needed one shot and it was practically impossible for me to miss. I might not have been the best archer on Berk, but the distances involved in the Kill Ring were short enough and my target was a Nightmare. I didn't even need to make a fatal shot. All I needed was to land a hit, anywhere on the creature's body.

"Just promise me it won't go wrong," said Astrid as she approached me. I looked in to her eyes, and she looked into mine. I hoped it wouldn't, either, but knowing my luck it was best to have low expectations.

Gobber stepped closer, ruining the moment. "It's time, Hiccup. Knock him dead." The gates to the Kill Ring were opening.

Tuffnut yelled, "Show 'em how it's done, my man!" before giving me a gentle push on the chest.

Toothless walked over, giving me one final parting before I faced the beast. "Good luck, bud."

I replied to him, "You, too." And then I walked through the gates. I placed on my helmet as I walked through. The gates closed behind me. The audience was cheering for me, me, once named the Useless. The weight of their shouts and praises was more terrifying than any dragon. I had to face it and I walked cautiously to the center of the Kill Ring. I took a glimpse at my father as he sat on that stone throne of his, with Gothi and Gobber watching right beside him.

I didn't bother going to the weapons rack that was prepared for me, I had my own things. I could only imagine my father say something along the lines of "I would've gone for the hammer" when he saw me. I was coming into this fight with only a bow and arrow and a small dagger, not at all anything resembling the typical Viking standbys. I was never typical though.

I gulped down my fears. My life and Toothless's would be decided by this moment. In one action, I could change things. As long as people and dragons saw each other as enemies, there would never be peace and Toothless and I would be forced to be enemies. The first step in changing that was by making everyone understand that we could communicate with each other. If they could see each other as people, maybe we could start negotiating. Sure, most foreigners think we Vikings are only warriors, that lived and breathed for battle, but the truth was, we liked to make deals, to trade, to exchange. Once people saw that dragons could be dealt with like other people, deals could be made, treaties could be forged. It would be better than having one kill the other if they so much as looked at each other. "I'm ready," I said.

As soon as I said that, the locks holding the room with the dragon cages came undone. The Nightmare burst forth, already set ablaze. It skittered around the arena, clinging to the walls and the breathing fire here and there. The crowd cheered the display of close calls. It hung itself upside down from the metal chains that kept it trapped. It turned its attention to me and stepped down right in front of me. I stepped back, recoiling in fear. It kept approaching me every time I stepped backwards.

I wish I had a shield for this. This dragon did not seem to be lazy in the least, it seemed driven and quite focused on me, snarling. If it wanted to, it could burn me to death, well, try to anyways; Alvin survived an explosion, I'm sure I could survive this dragon's breath.

The crowd urged me to kill it, cheering on that I had the strength and the power to slay this beast. I didn't want to do that. It was another person, a complete stranger in dragon form. It, no, he, didn't deserve to die for amusement, for a trophy. And the only way to do that was by changing him. I cautiously drew my bow, notching the special arrow.

The dragon seemed confused for a moment, this was probably his first time seeing a up close; Toothless was much the same way when he started examining his first crossbow. He was too interested in my weapon of choice to defend himself and there was not enough distance between us that I could miss my mark. I picked an area where I could easily attack and was not fatal. I shot his hind leg. The dragon screamed and recoiled from my hit. It bled and was driven back.

And thenâ€¦ nothing. No sparks, no arrow being consumed by green fire, no spontaneous transformation into a human boy, nothing. Toothless's arrow failed to work. It did not function. Maybe it was because it was an actual arrow or maybe it was because I was not the one who made it. Either way, I now had an angry dragon who was upset I had harmed him.

I ran. He followed me. I over the weapons rack. He ploughed through it. I did my best to evade him. "Stop the fight!" I heard my father cried. "I said stop the fight!" And then I could barely hear the sound of something hard and heavy hitting metal, a signal to get Viking's attention. Maybe this was a bad idea with poor planning after all. I needed to get out, survive.

"Hiccup!" I heard Astrid and Toothless cry from the gate that held me open.

Then, things got worse. Suddenly, the gate that held the dragons inside burst open. The whole room was filled to the brim with dragons, every Gronckle, Nadder, Zippleback, and Terror that was kept inside for training purposes suddenly filled the room. Their cries which if I could understand were probably warcries, filled the room.

All of them screamed to get the Nightmare's attention and I could tell they were communicating, speaking amongst themselves. This gave me a little reprieve as the Nightmare was no so focused on me, instead I could see a small Terror landing on to the Nightmare's snout and chitter something to the much larger dragon. I could swear he was listening. Both of them turned their back to me and I could feel the icy feeling creep through my spine.

Vikings entered the room from every entry way available to subdue the dragons. Some had weapons and wooden shields, but most went in barehanded and tried to grapple with beings that were more than twice their size. I could find only chaos where I was. Toothless and Astrid shouted for me to escape, the gate I had entered through had been forced open by my father as we went to subdue to the largest

dragon.

I had to run, I had to escape, this was bad, bad, bad. The gods must have been working with the Norns for this to happen. I ran towards my friend and my only way out. I was almost there, when suddenly, I felt something warm on my backside. It wasâ€¦ oddly comforting, yet searing hot and painful at the same time. I fell to the ground, just outside.

My body hurt and ached, I flipped myself on my back and realized I had been burned, directly hit by a gout of flame. I could see Toothless and Astrid knocked to the ground by the same blast, but mostly unharmed, save a few burns. I took the brunt of it though, apparently, I had been directly hit by the blast. I would have been dead by now, if it were not for that potion's healing, but I was still experiencing the pain of being burned. I couldn't move, but that did not matter. The dragons were inside, and I was outside, I did not have to run anymore. The metal gate was falling back into position, just in time to trap the dragons inside.

It never finished. That gate was torn off its hinges as the Nightmare came bursting through that gate before it could be locked in place. The metal gate landed just short of my feet and it was only due to luck I was not pinned under what must have been several hundred pounds of iron. Though the Nightmare was quite large, the hole he made was enough for it to squeeze itself out of. Vikings rushed in, trying to protect me with their shields and sword, but the dragon was not alone. Others followed through, providing the dragon with enough protection to focus all of his attention on me. Okay, man, he was persistent. He must have really been sore about me shooting his foot.

I tried to get up and run away, but I was still recovering from the damage I took. I was utterly helpless to stop it from placing me inside one of his clawed feet and carrying me away. I could see the ground moving away from me, the Nightmare was flying off, with me as though I was some sheep. I was just so tired, so hurtâ€¦ I didn't know how long I would last.

Before my vision got too blurry and my will to stay conscious failed me, my eyes saw my father, Astrid, and Toothless. I hoped that I would see my friends and family again. In fact, I was even sure I would miss Snotlout.

"Hiccup!" I heard someone cry, but I couldn't make sense of who it was; I was just so tiredâ€¦

* * *

><p>I awoke, groaning at the pain. My body ached in several places and for a moment, I couldn't remember why. I was once again in Hiccup's house, in his bed as usual, waking up with the light of dawn only barely prevented from entering into the house. I was not wearing my usual tunic, instead covered in cloths, bandages, I think. Blood had seeped into some of them. I was hurt, injured. Maybe Hiccup would know why, I certainly didn't.<p>

"You're awake," a voice said. I turned and looked and saw Hiccup's father, looming over my bedside. He seemedâ€¦ depressed, down. He also smelled of mead. I tried to get out of Hiccup's bed. I wanted to

get out of it, find out what happened. Why was I hurt? But that very pain stopped me. "Don't strain yourself, lad. You're lucky that you weren't hit directly. A dragon's breath is not to be taken lightly." And then I remembered yesterday.

I was closest to Hiccup when the Nightmare had stuck him with his Breath. While I saw Hiccup had taken the brunt of that attack, I took a few burns myself. I had a few burns ever since I started practicing blacksmithing, so I knew what to expect. It was never on this scale before. Maybe my fall also hard enough to tear open my skin, causing me to bleed.

It is unfortunate that for all of the comforts and utilities this body gave me, it was so frail. If I was still in my rightful form, these injuries wouldn't have crippled me yesterday and I might have done something to save Hiccup. But that wasn't anywhere near as important as the two dragons I saw yesterday—the Nightmare and that Terror. I knew them. I'll have to tell Astrid and Fishlegs once I meet them again, it was urgent. "How bad is it?"

"You'll be fine, two, maybe three days at most," Hiccup's father said dimly. I imagine he wished the same was true for his son.

We both heard a knocking on the door, Hiccup's father went over to it, and opened it, revealing to me Fishlegs and Astrid. "Is Toothless, okay?" said Astrid. She wasn't as injured as I was. I recalled her using a backflip to dodge most of the flame, only taking minor burns at best. As for Fishlegs, he wasn't anywhere near the battle from what I could remember, so it surprised me when he came by with a raw steak placed over his head.

"I'm awake," I said, before the chief could answer for me.

The man grinned a little, a smile in spite of the fact his only son was taken from him yet again. "I'll leave you three to yourselves."

"But sir," Fishlegs said. "I have to—"

Stoick though seemed to be rather frustrated with the boy, apparently he already knew what the larger boy had to say. "Fishlegs, I know you took a head wound and might have had a little too much to drink yesterday, but honestly, that doesn't mean your little story is true. It was just a dream, a mad dream, at that."

Fishlegs moved away from the door, defeated. Chief Stoick walked out of the house, leaving the three of us to ourselves. "What was that about?" I asked.

"We found him knocked out and surrounded by a dozen bottles of mead," filled in Astrid. "People think he was hallucinating or dreaming up a story because we lost Hiccup. Not that I don't blame them."

I raised my eye brows at that. "What do people think was a dream?"

Stiffly and firmly, Fishlegs answered, "I saw Trader Al turn into a Terror so that this red haired girl could sneak him in."

"I think I knew that Terror," I replied, still trying to put things

together.

"Who was he?" asked Astrid.

"He was a leader amongst my Kin, I don't know his name though." I recalled yesterday, when Hiccup and I saw Gobber taking a Terror from a red haired girl. For a moment, I imagined it was the Terror who was a Flight Commander, but I dismissed it as mere coincidence; Many dragons looked alike after all. Of course, when I noticed that Terror was giving orders and commands yesterday, I realized that my suspicions were correct. Of course if that was true, why was he here? Was it because of me? And why did he turn himself human? Or even how? Was any of this due to my King's orders? And for how long? I only met this 'Trader Al' once, but it seemed Hiccup known him for years. Did my King already know of the humans through him? This was all so confusing and I clutched my head, throbbing. There were too many questions and not enough information to answer them all.

I moved my attention the simpler and easier to understand topic of the Nightmare. At first, I had assumed it was just any other Nightmare. There were at least a hundred in the King's ranks. I was not expecting the Nightmare to be a Squire, nor was I expecting him to be someone I knew. He was one of One Eye's grandchildren and a peer of mine in the same Flight. Just before he took Hiccup away, I could almost swear he noticed me. He didn't say anything about that to the Flight Commander, so that was likely why I wasn't taken as well. All things considered, I probably would have preferred to be taken; I had more faith in the healers amongst my own kind.

I broke my contemplations to see that Astrid and Fishlegs were looking at me. "I bet he's really frightened now," Astrid was talking about Hiccup. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," I replied. And I did not. Everything was so confusing. And why didn't the arrow work on the Nightmare? Things would have been so much easier yesterday if we had to deal with a probably hundred pound boy instead of a several ton dragon. "Get answers maybeâ€¦| Maybe talk to Trader Al, ask him about this." It was a safe bet he'd know more about what was going on that I did. Though that assumed he was on the island still.

"Well, he's not due to leave till tomorrow," said Fishlegs. "I'm not going anywhere near him though." I nodded. I'm guessing Trader Al might have injured the boy, so I understood if he wanted to not fight. But that was fine. I did not need him for that.

I tried to get up from Hiccup's bed yet again. I still hurt but I managed to get out and stand. I breathed in and out, focusing on blocking pain. "Hey," Astrid yelled. "You've got to take it easy for the next three days."

"I don't have three days," I said. Nothing made sense right now; I had to make something understandable. "I need to see Al, now." Astrid, being Astrid restrained me just by twisting my arm and getting me in a wrist lock. It was automatic on her part. "Ow!"

"You're not going anywhere when you're that hurt."

If I wasn't already suffering from other injuries, I would have

contested the hold. I probably would have lost, but I would have at least been able to say that I put in the effort. But as it was right now, I was no match for her. I sat down on the bedside. "Fine, you win," I said with clenched teeth. She removed her hold on me.

There was a moment of silence between us. "So we know what to do about the people who had taken him." Astrid. "But what do we do to get him back?"

I sat there, thinking. If the Terror and the Nightmare were both members of the Knighthood, it stood to reason they would take their captive to our King. And that meant, since our King never left the Nest, it was likely Hiccup was being taken there as well. Having spent a few weeks amongst Vikings, I knew just how badly they wanted to find that place, that they went on months long expeditions every year so that they might end our Hunts. But as a Squire, I knew all of the tricks, the secrets, and the defenses the Nest employed. I could get there, easily. I told this to Astrid, "I know where they taken Hiccup the Nest."

For a moment, I saw a blink of confusion on Astrid's face. "Wait, you know where the Nest is? The thing we've been after since Vikings first sailed here?" Astrid asked. It was almost as if she had forgotten what I once was. I almost forgot that, too.

"I was a dragon," I said. 'Was' being the key word here. "Of course, I know."

"Well, fine, we can set off an invasion force, save Hiccup like we did with Alvin." She wasn't thinking about the needless loss of life or of the fact that action could make peace or at least a ceasefire impossible. She also did not even know what the King was or what power he wielded. I would only need to tell her about that.

I shook my head. "My King, my Lord, has powerful," I said. Though my King was incapable of leaving the Nest, he possessed not only sorcery by the martial forces employed by his three Flights. "If all of Berk raised up arms against him, it would be a slaughter on both sides."

"Then what do we do?" asked Astrid.

My answer simple, "We call for help."

"Who?" Astrid asked, not putting what I meant together.

Fishlegs, answered for me. "Camicazi." I smiled. Once we were done with Trader Al, we were going to break Hiccup out of the Nest. Camicazi's stealth skills were going to be invaluable there.

I hope my Lord understands that I am not doing this because I am his enemy.

* * *

><p>I imagine that many Vikings on Berk would rationalize the fact that Hiccup was turning part dragon with his new found celebrity status as his form being a disfigurement, like losing an arm or burns or something. Effectively, they equate scales with scars in this funky scenario, especially since all of Hiccup and Snotlout's changes

were brought upon because of conflict or injury.

****I originally planned to use enchanted clothing as the trigger for the dragons blending in with humans, in a semi-reversal of the traditional "animal skins" method that selkies or wereseals were known for. I realized how awkward it would be, especially since clothing was so flammable. Such a thing would not be reliable for dragons. I opted for jewelry instead, because it was more portable.**

****Recently, it occurred to me I made a grammatical mistake. I keep using the words bolts and arrows interchangeably, when they are clearly different things. I am addressing this in story now and editing it for later.****

****I also just realized I had been spelling sorcery wrong every now and again. I'll have to go back and edit that.****

15. Chapter 15

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****This chapter and the next are the ones that I've been waiting to make since this story started. I want to hear your reactions.****

****I wish I could reply to some of your reviews, but I cannot PM guest accounts, sadly enough. But I will say that Ivan, there is Angst and Drama in this story, it's just not the main focus of it and is heavily balanced out by positive emotions and good developments.**

****This chapter was actually much more than I had anticipated, and because I realized the next one was going to be rather sparse, I put a snippet from here into the next one to balance out the length for both of them.****

****Enjoy and reveiw.****

*** * ***

><p>I felt cold, empty, like I was trapped in a glacier. My body was stiff, my vision was dark, my senses were dulled. Was I dead? But where was I then? I did not die of old age or sickness, I couldn't be in Helhiem and I was fairly sure this was not Valhalla or FÃ³lkvangr. I likely was not good enough or did not die gloriously enough to earn a spot in either of Odin's or Freyja's hall. A weakling like me wouldn't fit in those places anyways. And I wasn't in some mountain, sharing mead with my ancestors. I was cold, immobile and utterly. Then, did that mean I wasâ€ cast out, prohibited from going into those places. Story of my life, even in the afterlife, I did not fit in.<p>

Nothing I plan ever works. I try to shoot down I Night Fury a thousand times and when I finally succeed, I think he would make a great friend. I try to save my friends from Outcast Island, I end up breaking Astrid's only remembrance of her uncle. I try to use the stupid arrows to make a Nightmare into a human being, someone I could talk to, I get burned alive. I was barely human anymore anyways.

All I did was bring sorrow and frustration to everyone around me; I was named the Useless for a reason. This cold, was something I earned, I deserved.

Strangely though, I started to feel warmer, like I was being heated. It was not like I was on fire, but something was giving me the heat, the warmth. Was someone helping me?

My sense of touch was restored as my body warmed up, I could feel that was there was something crawling over me, many, many somethings; tiny, clawed things that skittered and that made chittering noises. I could almost swear I understood themâ€¦ like they were words, yet _not._

I felt something trying to pry my mouth open. I couldn't resist whatever it was, my muscles felt too weary to respond to my commands. Meanwhile, otherâ€¦ things poured water in my mouth by the gulfull. I was thirsty, I swallowed what water I could, no matter how salty or bitter it was. I wheezed and coughed a little.

_"He stirs," I heard someone say, a tiny, almost squeaky voice said. The sounds were clearly not Norse, but I understood them as if they were.

"What is he?"

"I do not knowâ€¦" There were hints of fear in their voices, why would anyone be afraid of me? Someone, some people, were aiding me. I didn't know who or what they were, but I appreciated the warmth.

After the third or fourth gulp of water, I opened my eyes to take a look at my captors. Three reptilian faces looked back at me. A fourth one, I could see at the corning of my eye, was repeatedly spitting water into my mouthâ€¦ "Urk!" I gagged as I lifted my back from the hard stone floor. As I did, a _blanket _made of a dozen Terrors leapt off of my body and scattered everywhere, making shouts and cries of fear as they did.

I still felt like vomiting; I just drank dragon spit. Why couldn't dragons invent cups? It would have been much less disgusting than having to use their mouths to pour me a drink. I was just glad Toothless never decided to do this to me.

Okay, so maybe I wasn't as dead as I thought. I keep forgetting that fire is not something that could outright kill me anymore. Old habits, I suppose. Which left me still having no idea where I was. Though I suppose that not being dead was an improvement.

My environment was dark, yet I could see as though everything was lit by a few well placed candlesâ€¦ from both my eyes. It was a cave of some sort, maybe I was underground. It smelled, mostly of ashes, but there were a dozen other stenchs that lingered through the air. I could hear echoing sounds, the cries of dragons too far away to be clearly heard.

Given that the Nightmare kidnapped me, I was likely at a nest of some sort. I hoped it wasn't the Nest, where Toothless said his King resided. That would have just made my day right there. Meeting what

might have been Jǫrmungandr's brother might have been something that got me a spot in the Viking Epics, but I don't think I want to be remembered as the guy who got eaten.

I found a puddle of water nearby, likely where the terrors gave me something to drink. Despite light being limited, I could see my reflection clearly enough. I regretted having my curiosity.

I was a mess; I knew that the moment I started understanding dragons. But I never understood just how wrong I was until I saw my reflection. Despite having been burned, my tunic and trousers still survived, but only barely. My transformation stretched it to its limits, leaving it only a shambling mess as I had grown to double my original size. My face had been warped significantly, with both of my eyes becoming the olive yellow with a dark iris in the middle and my mouth and nose fusing together to form a rounded snout. My wings had grown large enough to reach my arms, my hands were in an awkward phase where they were just as likely paws as they were hands, my hair was gone, replaced by dark fins and an assortment of bumps, and most depressingly, not a trace of my original skin remained, all of it replaced by the black scale of a Night Fury's. I was still mostly human shaped, but I was clearly no longer human. No one was going to think I was ever a boy.

I stood on my feet. They were still called feet right? My balance was still good enough to walk upright, but I wondered how long I was going to be able to keep it like that.

My ears twitched when I heard that there was a sound heading right at me. I turned and looked. There were two Nightmares who were approaching me. One of them I recognized as the one who had kidnapped me earlier, the other was a far older, yet slightly larger one who lacked an eye. I think I saw him once, way back at Fort Sinister.

"It's awake!" said the younger dragon.

"He is awake," I corrected. They did not seem to acknowledge me speaking as they went to their conversation as though they couldn't understand me. Great, just great. I could understand them, but they can't understand me. Fortunately for me, it seems the older dragon would be correcting him for me.

"He" corrected the elder.

"What is he then?" That was a good question. What was I? I was somewhere between a dragon and a human.

"One of our wayward Kin, soon to return to the fold," said the elder. What did he mean by that, exactly? I knew the words he said, but I didn't understand what he meant. Did he actually consider me as a dragon? "Grandson, you should be fortunate that your Breath did not injure him, our Lord has great interest in this one." I raised my eyebrows at that. That was not good. Toothless's King, a dragon who he said was the size of some mountainsides, had an interest in little, tiny me. I just hoped he was not going to become his supper.

The younger Nightmare bowed his head in shame, "I'm sorry, grandfather," he said. So they were grandparent and grandchild. Interesting.

I wanted to run, but this might have been my only chance to get an audience with the King. Toothless said that as long as I was invited to his domain, I was fine as he had to have permission to harm me. Kidnapping probably qualified as a very forceful invite. Well, I was clearly a dragon by this older one's standards, so hopefully, the same applied as well to their ruler.

"Good," said the older Nightmare as he turned his attention to me. "Ruseclaw, what madness had befallen you this time?" He was talking to himself, probably thinking I was probably unaware of what he was saying. Who was this Ruseclaw he spoke of? And what did he have to do with me. "When is he returning?" he asked his grandson.

"The day after tomorrow," said the younger.

"I am going to have to ask what went through his head when he returns home," said the elder. "In the meantime, we must take this one to the King." The older dragon flattened himself against the ground as he said this. Then the younger, with a motion of his tail, threw me atop of the dragon's back, my belly over the ridge of his back. Toothless never exactly covered defense, when he taught me some tricks of the tail, so I wasn't prepared for it. Reflexively, I gripped onto the older Nightmare's side, holding for dear life. I did not want to have that happen again. Thankfully, it wouldn't.

As soon as I was on him, the one eyed dragon began moving out where he came from. In only just a short walk for the Nightmare, we exited the cave— only to find ourselves in another cave. It was a good thing I decided not to run away, as the cave we had just was at least several hundred feet from what must have been the bottom of our new cave. The cave we had entered in was a huge, cavernous place with a large hole in the center. Sunlight shone directly into the place, making the world seem unnaturally bright to my light sensitive eyes. I had heard of volcanoes before, mostly in books, but this was my first time seeing one— let alone from the inside. Go figure, the dragons lived in a mountain that spewed fire.

The one eyed dragon glided downwards, to some stone platforms just above the banks of reddish fog with his grandson behind us. I disembarked the moment he stopped flying. I felt sick to my stomach, it might have been the memory of the Terror spit or the motion sickness from flying in an awkward position.

I tried to suppress my anxiety, my nausea, my fear. So far, so good. As long as I kept my calm, I think I was going to be fine. I looked around for a moment, noting the lack of dragons nearby. Sure, I could see, a thousand dragons overhead, but not on this platform where I stood. Were there special rules about them?

"My Lord and my liege, I have brought one that you seek. I beckon you to come forth, my King," said the one eyed Nightmare.

I braced myself to face the dragon King.

It was not enough.

Up from the red fog came the mere head of a being that was could have regarded me as I would a mouse. So dense were the red cloud parted like water, they blew past me though I was a rock held firm

against the waves. Six eyes, each seemed to pierce my very being took note of me and the dragon. The younger Nightmare and I both cowered in awe and fear of this behemoth, for we both knew that this was the being that would decide our fates.

The older Nightmare had his head bowed in supplication to his master, his king. And his king responded in a voice that shook mountains.

***"Arise, Flight Commander One Eye, for I have come." **I have spent my whole life looking up at people, people who were bigger and stronger than meâ€| but this was ridiculous on a scale that was only possible for someone as godforsaken as I was. ***"You have brought the young male as is the one who brought him. Where is Flight Commander Ruseclaw?"**

"He is still maintaining his deception as always. No one will suspect his involvement."

***"As it should be, " **replied the King. Fortunately for me, the King was planning to deal with the younger Nightmare first. Unfortunately for me, however he dealt with his own servant meant that it would likely reflect on his treatment of me. ***"Yesterday, you have brought the young male's flesh, broken and battered, but alive and recovering. Though, despite your overzealousness, he has survived and stands before us, listening to our words." **I gulped. The King knew I was able to understand their conversation! How did he know that? ***"What do you have to say for yourself?"**

I saw the two Nightmares look over me for a moment before turning back their attention to their ruler. "My Lord, it was the heat battle and it was all I could do to secure our escape. Had I not done so, the other captives and I might have perished."

The King seemed to consider this for a moment, definitely heeding those words and weighing them for his decision. ***"In light of this, I will not strip your rank and your title from you, but I will not award you any Glory and neither elevate you to a full Knighthood nor will I bestow upon you a name." **When I first met Toothless, he did not even have a name. It boggled the mind how dragons were able to keep track of each other out names, but I suppose they did. Receiving a name, from what I gathered, was a big deal.

The younger Nightmare bowed a little, like a weight seemed to have dropped from his shouldersâ€| did Nightmares have shoulders? Their wings and arms were more or less the same limb, would that be called a 'shoulder'? I guess it did not matter when making a metaphorâ€| "Thank you, my Lord, I am grateful," he was definitely satisfied with the results.

The King had something to reply with. ***"Go now, child, and rest your wounds, you have suffered much at the hands of the Herd. You have survived what Kin can attest to, but you should never let those beasts have a second chance." **I took offense to that. Really, just because we were Vikings, the whole world just seemed to think we were savage and only capable of being brutish. Things were definitely that bad if even the _dragons_ had that opinion of us.

"Yes, my King." And so the younger Nightmare flew off, leaving me with the older Nightmare and someone who probably was another of Loki's sons. That guy really went aroundâ€|and had kids that could be mistaken for landscape. Still, I was not expecting the King to be

soâ€¦ polite and well mannered for a being that could have used me as a toothpick. He treated his servant rather well, being fair and not unreasonable at all. Maybe I had a chance to deal with him after all. Assuming, that he treated me in much the same way. Try not to think about Hiccup-pancakesâ€¦

The King turned his attention to me. **"And now it is your turn, young one. Speak your mind for you are amongst your own kind," **he referred to meâ€¦ as if I was already a dragon, that I was one of them. That was oddâ€¦ but maybe that was the only thing preventing me from flatting.

I shivered for a moment, gathering my will. This was my only chance. "I want to stop the war, the Hunts," I said. I took a deep breath, preparing the next. "Humans and dragons shouldn't have to regard each other as mere animals." I didn't even know he understood a word I said, but asked for me to speak. I did so.

The King definitely seemed to understand my words, but I could feel as though there was a hint of disapproval radiating from him. "No," he said. "There is no reasoning with those beastsâ€¦" So he could understand Norse! And that meantâ€¦ he likely knew that humans aren't just animals in the woods.

And he still refused to reason with us. Butâ€¦ why? Could he not reason with us. "We Vikings are not beasts, we're not animals; not any more than you are!"

"They are beasts, child." he said flatl**y. "And you are no longer like them."**

"I'm Viking," I said. Well, probably one of the worse Vikings, but that was what I was born as. "If they're beasts, thenâ€¦ I must be, too."

All six of his eyes focused on me, all of them glowed with what I could only equate as disapproval. One Eye was only getting half the conversation, but I figure he did not need to listen to support his ruler. **"Hiccup,"** he said my name. _My name._ The King knew my name. It actually was more directly translated as 'Chest Spasm', but it was close enough to rob me of sleep tonight. **"Has it ever occurred to you why there are so few Night Furies?"**

"Noâ€¦" I said. Most Vikings, not even I really bothered to ask that question. We were more concerned with how to shoot it downâ€¦ And even when I succeeded, I wasn't really interested in that subject. And I think maybe Toothless knew the answerâ€¦ or didn't.

As I said my response, the cavern disappeared. A vision of the a daylight sky went into my view. Toothless told me at one time the King had magic of some sort. One of ability he had was to grant visions to people. Contrasting against the white clouds and light blue skies were the dark silhouettes of Night Furies. A dozen, no a hundred, or a thousand of them, flew in a vast formation heading towards the sun. I could make out the elderly and the young quite easily. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, as though it was an afternoon stroll. **"Once** **there were many of them, born of Lightning and Death,"** the King spoke to me in my trance.

Thenâ€¦ arrows, flooded my vision. My gaze turned towards a vast army

made of men dressed in bronze armor, all of them wielding identical sets of spears, shields, and swords. Romans, if I recalled correctly. They apparently liked to standardize their gear. The Night Furies were vastly outnumbered and were not even prepared for a fight. They died by the score. Only a few survivors remained, fleeing over distant waters where the army could not pursue them. **"By the hands of humans, mere beasts, they were hunted to near extinction. Only a handful remain."** **The vision ended.**

I was shakenâ€¦ that was why there so few of them around. I did not know if that was how it actually happened, butâ€¦ it was depressing to think of it. Poor Toothless. Did he know about this? "But we're not Romans," I said.

"No, but does not matter what the Herd chooses to call itself," said the King. **"Since ancient times, the Herd and Kin have been against each other, each trying to undo the other. The ones who served Caesar are but the latest. As sure as the wind, there can be no peace between usâ€¦ When the time is right, I will end this war."** **As in, destroy every human settlement, starting with Berk.**

I had to convince him to not do that. But how could I when his words were backed with must have been things he had seen for himself? I appealed to the most basic of reasonsâ€¦ "But Berk is my home! You can't destroy that."

"You never fit in there." **How could he know that? Or my name for that matterâ€¦**

Okay, so maybe he doesn't value human things, maybe something "But what about Toothless? He likes Berk, too."

The King seemed even more disappointed when I said that. He knew who I was talking about. **"He has become infatuated with things he should have been prevented from. I only hope we can save him before it is too late."** **Wellâ€¦ at least he cared for Toothless. Or pretended to be at any rate.** **"Child, forget about that little village; you are destined for greater things."** **I just sighed. Really, I just had to live a life where the people who believed in me were the ones who kidnapped me.** **"Keeping your heart attached to the life you had lost will only bring you grief."**

"It's my home," I said. My reasons were simple enough that I could focus my will on that. Why was the King so adamant on wanting me to join up with him. "I grew up there. I might not have enjoyed every minute of it, what with all the sleet every time it wasn't hailing, but Berk is my home. I can't justâ€¦ forget about that."

The King noticed my defiance, and I could only feel a sort ofâ€¦ sadness, grief coming from the great beast's presence. Really, now that I thought about it, why was I able to feel his emotions, like they were there. Was this something the King did so that I could understand him or was it something else? **"What do you have to look forward to there?"** **I wanted to answer, but he kept going on.** **"A father who does not understand you, a people who's opinions are as fickle as moon, a place that you were powerless and weak; what were you before you started to become one of us?"**

I tried to reply. Nothing came out of my mouth. My dad, even after I started changing was still distant. We gotten a bit closer now that I

could actually do some of the things he wanted, but I still would rather go hunting for trolls. My popularity was only because I won the biggest event of the year, I had no doubt that once Thawfest rolled in and Snotlout brought home the trophy, people would look up after him instead. I couldn't help but feel the King might have been rightâ€¦ I was nothing before this. I only survived Outcast Island because I had the potion's effects to heal me; I only beat Astrid because I had tail. I said nothing.

***"Listen to me child, I give you the chance to remake yourself as you **_**should have been**_**," **said the King, a tone of desperation in his, albeit loud, voice. ***"Please, I urge you. Let me complete what has already begun. You will be among the greatest of **_**our Kin**_**, not some lowly boy who is bested by mere peasants. Let me help you."**I had visions, this time of a possible future I could have. There was no trace of the weak boy I had been or any vestigial remains of my humanity I was a Night Fury, complete. Toothless was beside me, in his true guise. Both of us stood amidst a screaming throng of followers, of disciples. A part of meâ€¦ wanted to accept that possibility.

Butâ€¦

"Noâ€¦" I said. No matter how much I wanted it. I still had my duties and responsibilities to my Tribe, my people, my loved ones. My dad gave up many comforts when he became chief, making decisions for the good of all, no matter how much it displeased him. Some of them were at my expense, such as spending months at a time leading Nest hunting parties, but I was his heir. I had to live to the expectations he set before me. At least, that was what I could keep trying to tell myself. He had a great offer, but I justâ€¦ wanted to refuse it as much as I wanted to take it.

The King did what I imagine must have been a sighâ€¦ It created a gust that knocked me on my back. ***"You are so stubborn."**

"Runs in the family," I said nonchalantly for someone who was on the ground. Yeah, annoy the creature that could so much as breathe to knock me down. That was a smart idea.

***"It displeases me to do thisâ€¦ but it is for your own good. I will complete you." **I did not like the sound of that. I got to my feet, ready to sprint at a moment's notice. I did not know where to go, but I imagine being anywhere else was safer than standing where I could be crushed dead. I found that the one eyed Nightmare had disappeared, probably figuring out what was going to happen next. I realized my preparations were kind of pointless when I forgot one thingâ€¦

The King exhaled a gout of flame that filled the whole platform. Like most dragons, the King could breathe fire. I was burned, again. It was oddly comforting, not at all painful, like being burned alive like yesterday. It was likeâ€¦ laying out in the sunshine in a warm afternoon, at just the right temperature. It reminded me of some naps I had on my favorite rockâ€¦ I could use a nap right nowâ€¦

* * *

><p>I hated burns. Not only were they a constant reminder of the fact I was no longer fireproof, they hurt. A lot. My skin had blistered in several spots, most notably on my chest. Why didn't my arrows work as

intended? I would rather dealt with an angry boy who would probably have trouble standing over a fire breathing dragon. And I wasn't even the primary target, no, that was Hiccup.<p>

Everyone in Berk mourned the loss of their new hero, most especially his father, who was on his twenty seventh bottle of mead.

And only Hiccup had the ability to utilize the book's sorceries for some reason. Fishlegs and I went to study it again, mostly to look for anything to aid us and to pass the time since I was bedridden for most of today. We did not find much other than stuff I already knew because I was a dragon, such as dragon nip, which by the way, I liked to roll around in... I wonder if there were pockets of the stuff on Berkâ€|Maybe I could get Fishlegs to grow themâ€|

In any case, I had recovered enough that I could at least walk out of the house without being accosted. She had been waiting for me, wooden box in tow. She gave the box of arrows, hopefully Al knew something about them. This was our chance at getting some of the answers we needed.

Trade Al was a mysteryâ€| For one, he knew sorcery, specifically, about the potion. Two, Fishlegs said he had become a Terrible Terror, just right before I had an encounter with a very diminutive Flight Commander I barely knew. It was possible they were the same person. And if so, that meant my King had Hiccup.

"Are you ready?" Astrid asked me.

I nodded. That man was going to leave Berk first thing tomorrow, we had no choice but to confront him now. She had a plan for this, though, I barely understood the fine details. My role was simple, I was going to go speak to Trader Al, hopefully he would be willing to take me back homeâ€| and give me back my friend. As for Astrid, I had no idea what she intended to do. She was doing something, just not with me.

The night was cold and dark, our only illumination was the dim light of hearths from each and every building. I hate the dark, I can't see a thing. Hopefully the extra oil in my lantern was going to last long enough. We stood, quietly trekking through the docks with only a few words here and there to ease the monotony. One thing Astrid said to me, once we were making our way down the ramps to the docks was: "Wish Camicazi was here for this, it would be so much easier with her."

"Why?" I asked. I liked Camicazi, she was cheeryâ€| if a bit too much so, but it was nice to have someone like her warming your spirits while in a dungeon. We had already sent a letter to her, but she wasn't going to be here before Al was already gone.

"She's better at stealingâ€|" and suddenly, I knew what Astrid's plan was. Fishlegs had explained later that Trader Al had transformed by removing a ring from his fingers. Chances were, whatever magic allowed Al to blend amongst the Herd was tied to that ring of hisâ€| I wonder, did that apply to the rest of the crew? All Astrid would need to do was to take one of those rings off of them I wagered. Of course that left a more obvious problem.

"Wouldn't that cause the whole crew to attack you?" I said. And she

said Hiccup and I had mad plans.

"I'll only do it if you can't convince Al to help usâ€|" she said.
"I'm the backup plan."

I nodded, understanding. "And what happens if you fail to take it?"

She refused to answer. I hated that.

We finally made our way to the cedar planked ship. It was lit, with men making last minute transactions to and from the watercraft. All of them eyed me for a moment, each with a look of suspicion. There were four teenagers, each staring boredly out to sea. Al was overseeing the transfer of goods, mostly food stuffs for the voyage home. He spotted me, taking his gaze off his ledger. "Oh, Toothless, what convinced you to come here all alone?"

I glanced off to my side, noting that Astrid seemingly disappeared. Wow, she was good. "It's aboutâ€| Hiccup," I said. Among other things.

"I'm sorry for the loss of your friendâ€|" said Al, in a sorrowful tone. "It is likely that the dragons killed him and ate him, you'll likely never see him againâ€|" While many of my dragons killed and ate humans, it wasn't really a popular activity, usually deviants and the desperate did that.

I shook my head. With my next statement, I was going to be revealing myself to him or at least making him draw conclusions. "They wouldn't. If they were, the Nightmare wouldn't have been the one taking him." Because it wasn't in a Knight or Squire's duty to carry prey. That was beneath us. That and all of the peasants and commoners that escaped took nothing else, clearly more interested in running than eating.

Trader Al and everyone turn their eyes on me. "And why is that?" asked Al, a tense tone in his voice. He was clearly suspicious how I would know that sort of thing. Yes, he was definitely.

"If Hiccup was going to be food, the task would have been delegated to someone of lower stationâ€|" Which was everyone except the Nightmare and the Terror...

Al threw his ledger to the ground, it was no longer important. "And how would you know if the Nightmare was someone important?"

"He was born into that role, inherited his position because of his Brood patron being a Flight Commander." Broods were something akin to Viking Clans, although a bit more awkward. See, unlike Vikings, tend to take temporary mates, lasting for only during the mating season. Broods are the term describing extremely large and successful lineages made by a single common parent or grandparent, but not much farther back than that. One Eye, when he was active, I heard was quite attractive. Obviously, this information was not something anyone who didn't understand the terms and social conventions would simply just know about. Fishlegs clearly didn't and he knew some stuff about dragons even I didn't know.

I saw Al turn pale, the realization dawning on his face. "You'reâ€|

him. Night Fury, you wereâ€¦ right in front of me the whole time!"

I nodded. He knew who was. My name was Toothless, but I suppose I cannot blame him, that wasn't a name the King had given me. Now we could reveal who were. "Yeah, I was." I bet he was really regretting not allowing me to come with Hiccup now. Of course, did that mean that Trader Al wanted my friend to our King since he could help. Of course, I had never heard of a Flight Commander ever transforming himself willingly and for so long too. Al had apparently been trading with the Vikings for years. It made as much sense as a Terror commanding his own Flightâ€¦

"This is excellent, we had been searching for you ever since that Gronckle had informed us of your current stateâ€¦ Everyone in the Nest had been worried. My King had even sent some of One Eye's Squires to help find you." I looked at the teens the merchant glanced at, they eyed me with suspicious tones. Suddenly, I knew who they were, placing faces that I was more familiar with to the human ones. They were Squires of One Eye, my compatriots, my allies, my peers. The others aboard the craft were likely Knights, Squires, and maybe others tied to the Terror's Flight. "Even your mother wishes you to return home." I laughed at that last statement. My mother, caring about what happened to me. That was wealthyâ€¦ was that how that human saying went? It made no sense.

"Also, I am sorry for my earlier conduct, especially with yesterday. We did not know who you wereâ€¦" Trader Al said. Well, at least he was apologizing for being part of the reason I had burns. I hate my burns. "Come, Night Fury, we will take you home to your Kin, maybe even find a way to return you to your trust self."

It would be great to go home, be amongst my own kind, again. I'm tired of being weak, tired of not seeing anything. But I had to make sure Hiccup was safe. I shook my head. "I need to make sure Hiccup gets back home safely. What has happened to him?"

"Our King will decide his fate, as is Law, but I do not think it is best for him to return to this island," said Al. What?

"What do you mean?" came from my mouth. Confusion and frustration held me for a moment.

"He no longer belongs here. It is dangerous for him to stay here. Sooner or later, he will find himself killed by the ones he calls his fellows. But amongst our Kin, he will be safe."

"But this is Hiccup's home," said I. "The place where not only had he grown up, but also the place where his loved ones are. He should be here."

"Your reasoning while valid, arguing against me is ultimately unnecessary; the King is the one who decides the boy's fate, if you must contest it, you must seek him. Aside, from that, what had happened to you? Why have you become one of the Herd?" said Al. Translation: 'I think you are being foolish and I don't want to talk about that subject. I'd rather talk about something else.' Adults really are the same no matter what species they belonged to.

Still, I decided that since I needed his cooperation, for now, I decided to oblige him. I needed answers, not fight. I opened the box

containing the two remaining arrows. I showed them to the merchant-sorcerer. "Hiccup struck me with these," I said. "He tried to do that same to the Nightmare as he did to me, but that didn't work for some reason. Though that might have been because I made them."

Al put on a pair of gloves and picked up one of the arrows. He examined them for a moment, carefully, inspecting them. "These are peculiar. Where did you and the boy learn how to make these?"

"Hiccup had a book, don't know where he got it from, but that's where we learned how to make the potion." He was our best bet at finally uncovering some mysteries, I had to speak truthfully for more than because honor demanded it.

"Fascinating, do you even know how they work?"

"No," I said.

"Once we return to our Lord, I will tell you about them," he placed the arrow back into the box. "It is an important matter, but nothing urgent." Well, if he was a Flight Commander, he was definitely going to uphold his promise, but at the same time, there was no guarantee I would get Hiccup back. Still, it was my best option. I only had to say 'yes'.

Then things started got out of hand. There was a splash as something hit the water.

"What have we here?" said one of the sailors. I turned and looked at the location of the splash, somewhere behind the teenagers, my fellow Squires. I was just in time to see the results of what had happened. There was a loud thump as Astrid was being yanked out of the water in a net by the two twins, together a Zippleback, singular and the some sailors.

Astrid might have been a great fighter, but even I knew that without weapons, in a net, and outnumbered, she had her limits. She struggled to break free, but the weight of the two parts of a Zippleback and burlier sailors, were enough to keep her down for the count.

The Flight Commander approached the downed shield maiden in training. This was bad, really bad.

The red haired girl, a Nadder who I once got into a fight over a swordfish came up between Astrid and her superior. "Flight Commander, I found this one swimming in the water, listening in."

"What is it with this town and everyone eavesdropping all the time?" said Al. "There no manners, no sanctity." As opposed to spying and lying about your identity. Granted, I had to deceive others to keep myself safe, but I planned to stop once I was safe.

Astrid looked up at the Flight Commander, saying nothing. She was clearly trying to keep herself from looking at me, to prevent me from being implicated. I could only guess why.

Trader Al said stuff for her. "You're one of the young ones who fought in the Choosing" Which pretty much everyone in the whole

village knew. "What did you hear?" There was now anger in his voice.

Astrid still refused to say anything.

"Are we going to let her go, like the last one?" said a much larger girl. If I knew her correctly, I think was a Gronckle. A bard, who had become fortunate enough to be accepted into the Knighthood.

"No," said Al, his voice, cold and dark. Chills went down spine. "The last one was always known to be rather odd. Few believe in his words and none would take him seriously." He drew a knife from bellow his belt. "This one, unfortunately is too trustworthy. I am sorry, child, but we can't let you tell anyone." Trader Al approached me, and gave me the knife. "I know this is nothing like rending prey with your teeth, but this is still a worthy kill, nonetheless. End her." While his words carried the promise of glory and satisfaction, his tone was one of regret. He disliked what he had tasked me to do, but saw it necessary.

I held the knife in my hand looking Astrid in the face. She was ready to do what was necessary to save Hiccup, even if that meant dying my hand so that I might be able to reach him. A few weeks ago, I would have just gutted her, right then and there. Now, I hesitate, contemplating my actions. Al must not have realized just how much I spent with Astrid, she was my friend, just like she was Hiccup's now. I couldn't just kill her.

Al looked at me, noticing my hesitation. "What are you waiting for?"

"Just thinking about how I want to do this," I said. There nothing but treason in my thoughts. I had no choice. I had to save her. But I was weak, still a bit injured and heavily outnumbered and outmatched. I might be able to fight off my peers as I spent much more time fighting in both training and in actual combat, but I had to wager the sailors were a match for the average Viking if they had been doing this for long enough. Though I did have plenty of lamp oil.

I threw my lamp at the sails, they caught on fire in a heartbeat. And was spreading down the ropes. The Knights and other secret dragons panicked to put it out. I charged through Trader Al, knocking him down, but he wasn't priority. I went over to Astrid using the time the chaos and stunned realizations bought me to tear open the net. It was funny how much of this reminded me of when Hiccup and I met. "What are you doing?" she slapped me in the face as I undid her arm. "You could have saved Hiccup!"

I rubbed the pain off my cheek with my free hand. Well, if that's how friendship with her went, I guess it was fine. "And Hiccup wouldn't forgive me if I let anything happen to you,"

Just as I undid her other arm, I was tackled to the ground by the Nadder girl. The knife flew out of my hand and I was separated from Astrid. "How could you do this to us?" she screamed as she kept pummeling me in the face, uncharacteristically sloppy for a Nadder, I might add. I easily blocked using my arms as a guard. "Whose side are you on?" That was a good question. I didn't know anymore.

In my prephial vision, I saw Astrid, free from her net, was fighting a battle against the Zippleback. It probably never occurred to any of them to decide to change back to their true forms to escape or fight better, but then again, people tended to forget things all the time.

I could not stay on the defense forever though and I needed a weapon to secure victory. I glanced over to a wooden box that had been feeling rather ignored as of late. Using an opening, between my peer's barrage of attacks, I slugged her and quickly drew an arrow. I jabbed it at her in the arm. I didn't need them to be magical, I just needed something to stab her with.

Except, now. The arrow burst into a familiar green flame. The necklace that the girl had been wearing shattered in my face. She was consumed in flames, body and all. I saw her clothes tear as she became far largerâ€ she was becoming a Nadder, her true form. Which was bad for me, because now I lost my combat and weight advantages. It became easier for her to get to the ground as she grew, wings and tail bursting from no longer needed clothing. "Much betterâ€ I was getting cramped up in that body." The magical fire died down only once she was done and I was under her foot, being crushed.

I really did not think Astrid could save me since she was still fighting. Fortunately for me, I did not need Astrid. I had someone else. The Gronckle bard picked up the remains of the net and threw them over the Nadder. She struggled a little, as the weight kept her from moving. The brunette girl then tackled her own comrade and knocked her off of me, into the water. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Uh thanksâ€" I said, looking up at the torrent of fire that I had started. The sail was almost completely gone and enough burning material was raining down on the deck that it was at risk of being set alight as wellâ€ "Let's get out of here." I said to the girl who helped me commit treason.

We jumped off the boat, not a moment too soon. Astrid came in right behind us, but not before throwing the Zippleback duo tied up like a bundle of rope onto the dock. "Well, that was easyâ€"

I looked at the houses near the pier. People were definitely taking notice of the fire. Men and women with buckets were coming over to us now. Trader Al, having recovered just looked at us, scorn and malice in his eyes. He wanted to kill me now, I had just betrayed one of the King's most loyal and greatest. I was a traitor, I had committed treason of the highest sort. He wanted to kill me, but he couldn't. There were too many witnesses now. "We'll see you back home," he said in a bitter tone. He gave a few orders to set sail even with the sail mostly damaged and the fire only being barely contained, leaving behind me and my peers behind.

The burning ship was already on its way out by the time the first Vikings came by. They were flabberghasted by the image they saw. "What happened?" said a familiar man who stood by another man with a bucket helmet, Mulch, was it?

"I found out who let out the dragons," I said.

"Trader Al was responsibleâ€" Filled in Astrid. Yeah, people were

definitely going to believe her. Especially since the merchant was nowhere near to defense himself. Obviously, the two twins protested, but they were strangers in a place where their word wasn't so tested.

"But how?"

"We'll explain later," I said. "But for now, we've got a Nadder problem." I pointed down into the waters where the boat had been. The Nadder was still there, still trying to escape her confines and only managing to stay afloat. More nets made it impossible to get free. "Just keep her locked up for a few days."

"Oh and we got some prisonersâ€¦" filled in Astrid. The two boys looked up at us. I bet they really wish they could change now. "Keep their hands bound, they might try some funny stuff."

"What about her?" ask Mulch to the brunette girl. "Isn't she one of Trader Al's apprentices?"

"She helped us," I said. "She's fine."

"Yeah," said Astrid. "She'll be coming with us." Well, she was definitely not going back to the King with her act of betrayal. Why did she do that anyways?

Nothing made sense any more. I was a traitor, I betrayed my King, my Kin. I fought against my own peers from my Flight. The arrows _still _confounded me, now changing a Nadder back into her true shape. Why couldn't they work that way for me? Did I make an error in the crafting? Was it because of the shape? The ones Hiccup made when he tried to slay me were far shorter and thicker, these were too narrow.

I sighed, the world was mad. As soon as Camicazi arrives, maybe as early as tomorrow, I was going to set things right. I was going to get Hiccup home and redeem my name. My King, I hope he would still welcome me home. Please, I am not his enemy.

* * *

><p>"Awaken, child and embrace the glory that is your birthright." I heard someone say to me. The voice soundedâ€¦ feminine, well, sort of. I felt it was, despite it being not.<p>

I pried my eyes open, breaking sleep's hold upon me. I stared into bright olive green eyes of another Night Furyâ€¦ and those eyes were looking quite intently at mine. I jerked back from the shock, a strange dragon looking back at you was not something I wanted in my mornings. I looked around, I was in another cave.

The Night Furyâ€¦ smelled female. But how could I know that? Well, by smelling, of course. I had a great nose. She opened her mouth again. "Ah, you awaken, child." This definitely was who was talking to me. This must have been Toothless' mother, the one I had been trying to kill me for the better part of a few years. I shyly backed away, Toothless apparently had some issues to work out with her.

"Uh yeahâ€¦" I said shyly. I noticed that she wasn'tâ€¦ all that much larger than me, maybe by a head or so more.

"Good," said Toothless's mother. Of course, I was wondering how she was able to understand me, yet One Eye didn't. No, I was being stupid, we all spoke the same tongue. A dozen of dragons, all of them, surprisingly smaller than I thought they would, deposited fish by the cave entrance. "Excellent, timing. You may go," said the Night Fury. They all gave curt bows and wandered off.

I walked over to the pile of fish. I was feeling quite hungry. I looked at Toothless's mother. It was her fish after all and it was better to ask for her permission than to incite her wrath again. Wait, but we just met, right? I remember, being much younger, not a mere hatchling or a fledgling, but still younger than I was now.

She noticed this and replied. "Eat, regain your strength, child. We have much to do tonight."

I nodded, silently. I turned my direction back to the fish pile. The odor was pungent with the scent of the sea. None of it was cooked, but I was starving. I don't remember the last time I had a good meal. I grabbed one a haddock by the mouth. Somehow, I knew I was doing something wrong when I had the whole fish's head down my throat. Plus, there had to be something important about that fish, I just couldn't remember what. It must not have been important, if I forgot it. I bit down on my meal, swallowing it gulps. The slimy coat was filling and brought back memories of summer afternoons fishing with

I shook my head. I went on the next fish and then the next. I only stopped when my stomach was full of meat. The Night Fury, smiled at me. "You have a quite an appetite."

"Uh yeah" I said.

"Then, let us go. We have things to do." The Night Fury got up, and beckoned me. We walked out into a sandy beach. There were dozens, maybe hundreds of dragons, each swimming out in the moonlight. The moon was waning, it somewhere between the half and crescent phase. In only ten more days, it would be dark. I hid behind the slightly larger dragon I was not used to be Really, why was she so small?

As we stepped onto the white sands, the dragons all paid their attention towards the Night Fury, their gazes petrified and wary. They were very afraid of her, not that I blamed them. "Do not worry, I will not harm you this day, instead I bring you a good omen." And then, she stepped away, revealing me to the crowd.

There was a murmur of confusion and gossip as they crowd saw me. "Isn't that Night Fury One Eye's Squire?" "No, a different one, this one is new." "A new Night Fury? Where do you suppose he will go?" "Maybe another Squire." "Where did he come from?" "This is good news!"

They were talking about me I was a Night Fury. I stood there thinking for a moment. Of course I was, I couldn't be anything else. I had black scales, I had large wings, I had a two fins on my tail. What else would I be? A human?

Some dragons approached me in my, most notably a Zippleback who asked

me some questions. "Do you know of the other Night Fury?" said one head.

"We once tried to pledge our services to him," added the other, looking very warily at the other Night Fury present. The duo were likely very thankful that she was keeping true to her word.

I opened my mouth. "Yes, I knowâ€¦" I wanted to say 'Toothless', but I couldn't help but feel that was wrong. That was a stupid name, come up by someone who probably just decided to use the first thing that came to his mind. Still, I had to answer the Zippleback. "He's my brother," I said, the words came easily out of my mouth. It was true after all, we had known each other sinceâ€¦ we were hatchlings. We grew up together. I still could remember every morning he would try to pretend he was a roosterâ€¦

The dragons all gave shouts of shocked surprise, they clearly weren't expecting that.

"How is it we never heard of you before?" asked a curious Nadder.

Mother answered for me. "That is not for you to know," she said, causing the Nadder to back away. "I do not say everything about me or my family."

"Say, where is the other Night Fury?" said another dragon, a Gronckle.

That was a good question. Where was Toothâ€¦ my brother? I would like him to join me. Just as much as I would likeâ€¦ this Nadder I knew to come along and my Gronckle friend. When were they coming back home? "I don't know," I said. "I hope he comes home soon."

"In time, he will come to us, my son. Be patient."

I bowed my head. "Yes, mother."

More dragons approached us, this time I recognized two of them, two Nightmares I had met earlier today. The older one lacked an eye. He said to me, "Greetings, child. It is good to see you awake. I apologize for not having properly introduced myself earlier, I have many names, but you may call me One Eye. I am your brother's Flight Commander and teacher."

"Thank you, sir." I bowed to him slightly. I heard he was a Flight Commander, an equal to my mother.

I glanced a little at the younger Nightmare, who was mostly keeping to himself behind his grandfather. I could swear he was muttering something under his breath. Something along the lines of 'what is happening?'

The old Nightmare smiled a little, his sharp teeth visible. "Do you remember your discussion with our Lord earlier?"

I looked back at my memory. "Yes, I do," I stated. I recalled much of my discussion earlier with the King. We fought over something, I don't remember what exactly, it ended only when I was blasted with a gust of flame. I was not hurt anyways, it was only fire. Fire was not

lethal most of the time, but it still hurt. "I don't very much like him. He breathed fire on meâ€| " He was also someone I was scared of. No dragon should be that big.

My mother spoke, "Child, you and our Lord may disagree but he will not harm you needlessly. He only did that to prevent you from doing something that could have made you harm yourself."

And now that I thought about about, that was somewhat trueâ€| I was attempting to run out of his den last night, forgetting that the stone platforms would were elevated enough that I might have fallen far enough to die. Exceptâ€| why didn't I fly out yesterday? I must have forgot it when I was too busy thinking he was going to crush me. "Rightâ€| I still don't appreciate being set on fire."

One Eye just laughed. "Child, I have served our King for many winters, he and I do not agree on many things, but I know he has our best interests at heart. Just, try not to be more careful next time."

I bowed me head and sighed. "I'll tryâ€|" even though I knew I likely would do something even more foolish next time.

"Now then, child, I do have an important matter to bring up to you."

"What?" I asked, curious. It wasn't every day I received something from someone.

"Would you like to join the Knighthood?" said One Eye. "I know you may not agree with the King's policies," -which I forgot what specific policies I disliked- "but that does not mean that you are unfit to serve him. I could always use another Squire."

I thought of that for a moment. Service was everything around here. Being a healer is sure to get me at least noticed. Being a laborer was tough, being one would at least get me a girlfriend. Being a bard. Exotic. Twice the status. And then there's the hunting. Only the greatest Kin became those. They had a nasty habit of stalking their prey for much longer than the needed to.

But the ultimate prize is the one all Kin aspired to, the Knighthood. It was an elite circle, where only those with either the talent or the connections. And I had both. Being offered a chance to join happened only rarely. That's why I wanted to take that. I wanted to prove myself. I didn't exactly have to like my King, only respect his authority. After all, I wasn't a weakling, I wasn't small. I should be aiming for the top to make sure everyone knew that. I deserved that.

"No," refused my mother. "I will be the one to take him to my Flight."

One Eye bowed, dejectedly, but he tried to hide that. "As you wish then, Dead Wings." Still, the elderly Nightmare tried to feign a smile at me. "It appears you are already spoken for."

"Sorry," I said. Even though I technically had nothing to be sorry about.

"Just as well, it might be best that you do not join us so soon," said One Eye.

"Why's that?" I asked.

"The Usurper," answered my mother, as-a-matter-of-factly. As soon as she did, the rest of my Kin fled. They were clearly afraid of who ever this Usurper was.

"Rogue Kin, extremely dangerous," said One Eye. "We do not know much about him or where he comes from, all we know his is brutality and viciousness. Three fiefdoms and six knights have already fallen due to this renegade. He must be slain before he causes anymore damage in the King's domain." I nodded. From the sound of things, the Usurper was top priority for him. "If you meet your brother again, tell him of my mission so that he might join my Flight." I nodded, respecting the elderly dragon's wishes. I was going to tell my brother and we were going to take down whoever this rogue was.

One eye and his grandson flew away.

* * *

><p>So, for those of you who do not understands Hiccup's comment about the King being a child of Loki, that has to do with the fact that Jǫrmungandr is the child of Loki. And Hiccup, only having experience with Nordic deities and some Roman one, would be trying to attach the King to fit in that world view. **

So do you guys feel I portrayed the King and Al as being "grey"? I want to avert making them flatout evil and more along the lines of making them somewhat "reasonable".

**Some of you who read Rift-Raft's fanfic are probably aware that a number of things in BtE are inspired by his work. Most especially in this chapter, Hiccup gets his mind invaded and rewritten by the King. I deliberately went out of my way to portray it happening somewhat differently in this work than what happened to the Queen. Very differently. **

**Still horrifying and feels disturbing, but done for different "stated" reasons and with very different results. **

16. Chapter 16

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

I think it'd be best for you guys to come to your own conclusions then on how the dragons are morally speaking, I have my point of view as well as the character's personal thoughts on the matter.

Also, this chapter, I'd like to get your reactions on this. 12k words and something I've been wanting to write for a while. Enjoy.

* * *

><p>However, you guys are really going to want to review this chapterâ€¦ Not to spoil anything, but I really want to know what you guys think about what happens here.<p>

"Is this even edible, Astrid?" the former Night Fury said to me as he eyed the loaf of bread I handed to him. That earned him a glare, which he tried not to notice. He was failing at that. I was in Gobber's forge, with its owner and his current apprentice, trying to keep themselves a bit busy. It was lunch time and today, I decided to be just a bit nicer to the boy who saved my life last night. Planning that, I decided to come by while he was working and give him a little something for the midday meal, a loaf of bread I baked this morning. Unfortunately, it appears he is rather hesitant about it.

"Why? What's wrong?" I asked.

Gobber grabbed the loaf bread and began using it to strike a heated rod of iron into a curved shape. When the older man was done, he handed Toothless back the bread loaf, seemingly undamaged. I didn't see anything wrong with it. "Well, for starters, I'm pretty sure that only a Gronckle would be able to eat that thing." Which apparently included even transformed Gronckles, I just happened to have one for a guest this morning.

"Astrid, just stick to breaking people's teeth with your fist, not with your cooking," said Toothless. That earned him another glare, which made the former dragon back away slightly. He may have saved my life last night, but that still did not mean he got to insult my cooking.

"You two are just bunch of big babiesâ€¦" I said, putting the bread loaf away. I still failed to see what was wrongâ€¦ and I could eat my own bread just fine. What did it matter if it could be used as an improvised blacksmithing hammer? I should really bludgeon someone with it.

"You try losing teeth," said Toothless. Whichâ€¦ was plenty ironic considering why Hiccup named him that. "I lost four already and I don't want to be missing more."

"Fine," I said, "Have it your way." Really the nerve of them. Insulting my cooking. That's the last time I bring them anything. Okay, admittedly, even my own father thinks I am a horrendous cook. Maybe I could find someone else who had taste.

"Just as well, I think it's time for a break anyhow," said Gobber as he went towards the entrance of the store. "Thirty minutes, Toothless."

"Yes, sir!" replied the apprentice.

And with that, the owner and proprietor of the workshop went out the front door. Likely he was going to the mead hall or going to talk with Chief Stoick, again. He wasn't in the best state ever since Hiccup had been kidnapped, but once I had made it known that Trader Al had been responsible for releasing the dragons the other day, he was arguably even worse. Now, not only was he mourning, but he was also enraged. Trader Al offered answers and solutions for his son's problem, but secretly plotted a conspiracy against him. Which was rather unfortunate for the Nadder and the two boys who were really a

Zippleback, but that's how it went when they were our captives

"So how are they?" asked Toothless. There was really only one 'they' that he could have spoken about, his former compatriots.

According to Toothless, they were Squires, warriors in training like I myself was. They were raised to be fighters from since they were hatched from their eggs and given the best training that could be given to them. The Nadder would likely be facing death or be saved up for the Kill Ring tomorrow. The two boys were likely going to get interrogated. Really, the only thing that prevented all of Berk from going after the brunette girl was because she was my guest and even then she was taken in for some questioning. "They're fine," I said, even though that might be a lie.

Toothless gave a sigh. "What am I going to do?" he said to himself. I couldn't imagine what was going through the boy's head right now. On the one hand he had saved my life, on the other he had effectively declared himself an enemy against his former people, well, dragons. I wonder, would Hiccup be forced to the same?

"It's bothering you, isn't it?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer to that question.

"No it's not," said Toothless in a bitter tone. He then raised his voice up in anger and shouted a little. "Nothing at all. After all, I had just imprisoned my fellow Squires and attacked a Flight Commander. Other than that, everything's going real swell."

I sighed, "So what do you want to do about it?"

"We have to get them back home," said Toothless. "Before something terrible happens."

I just stared at the former dragon, trying to reason with him. Me, reasoning with a dragon. A month ago, I would not be even considering such insanity, now it seemed like I was going to do that sort of thing every day. Toothless was still loyal to his people. He may have saved my life, but it was clear he was regretting his decision. Furthermore, he also knew the people we've taken captive. They were his friends or at least people he knew. That alone made him want to save them. Which was going to be a problem. "We can't save them right now," I said.

Toothless clenched his teeth. He was quite angry. "And why not?"

"We can't save Hiccup if we had them along." We had a plan for how we wanted going on about doing this. Camicazi, Toothless, and I were going sneak into the dragon's nest and liberate Hiccup. Camicazi had the stealth skills, Toothless knew the layout, and I would beat up anyone who got in the way. Adding more people would have made our mission more difficult and put us at risk of being discovered. It'd be even worse if we brought the Nadder or the two heads of a Zippleback. They could just fly off and alert the whole nest of our presence if they wanted. And well, I didn't exactly trust the twins or Snotlout to accompany us.

Toothless eyed me, knowing full well how bad an idea it is. "We can't

just leave them here. You know what Chief Stoick is going to do to them." Actually I didn't, but I could imagine. Most of them involved sacrificing, an axe, or both. Especially the Nadder.

"We can and we will." My reasoning was cold, but valid. It was probably easier for me than him because I did not care much at all for our captives. But at the same time, Toothless cared for them. "Look we can't save them right now, but I'll see if I can get Fishlegs and the others to keep them alive as long as they can. Once we have Hiccup, they fly home or something."

That seemed to calm Toothless. The boy gave a contented sigh. "Thanks, Astrid."

And just when we had resolved that issue, Gobber walked through the door of his workshop. "Alright, lass, breaktime's over. It's time for us boys to get back to work."

It wasn't even thirty minutes! He must have been counting too fast or something, because that did not feel like thirty minutes at all. I wish had bought that hour glass back when I last saw Trader Johann so I could contest the matter with the blacksmith, but I decided against it.

"See you, Toothless." I shouted as I left.

"Bye, Astrid," he said.

My business concluded, I made my way back home. I was stopped, however by a two figures, both of whom I expected to show themselves sooner. Fishlegs and the brunette girl approached me. "Fishlegs," I said to the large boy. "And you." Way back when I first met Toothless, I didn't think about it much when I learned that most dragons did not have names. Dragons could get away without having names as they had ways of separating each other, usually referred to each other by what kind of dragon they were or what color of scales they had. But that was impossible for us humans, our skin tones tended to be quite close to each other and outside hair color, separating ourselves with a simple phrase based on our appearance was impossible. I mean, calling her 'brunette girl' in a conversation was just awkward. And well, I couldn't call her a Gronckle, now could I.

"Meatlug," Fishlegs supplied, his tone one of hesitation. I gave him a look of confusion, unable to understand.

"My name is Meatlug," said the Gronckle, feeling much less hesitant.

"Wait what?" That could not be right.

"It just sorta happened" mumbled Fishlegs. "They needed a name and I was feeling rather hungry and so I said her name was Meatlug."

I just stared at the two of them. He named her 'Meatlug'. Trust the boy with possibly one of the worst names to come up with one that made just as much sense. At least 'Toothless' had a reasonable excuse. Honestly, was it really so hard to come up with a decent name for a dragon?

I just shook my head. Today was not the day to get angry at them, especially when I needed a favor. I decided to change the topic to something more relevant. "So how did the hearing go?" The newly christen Meatlug had been taken for interrogation earlier today. I was nothing really harsh since I said that she aided us, but it couldn't help to ask about that.

"Oh, nothing much," said Meatlug. I just can't get over that name. "I didn't tell them that what we really were or anything like thatâ€¦| though I think they might be suspicious over why we had a Nadderâ€¦|"

"Yeah, I wonder how long it'll be before they take my story seriouslyâ€¦|" mumbled Fishlegs. He was probably regretting having told everyone that he saw Trader Al turn into a Terror, though none of us really could know how this all would have turned out.

And then, I noticed something. Meatlug grabbed hold of the boy's hand, a delicate touch that held someâ€¦| meaning to it. "It'll be fine," said the girl. "They'll just think it's a story, right?"

The boy looked down for a moment, in silent and deep contemplation. "Right." And then the two of them locked eyes together, staring deeply into them. This all had more meaning than most people would think.

Ever since last night, I've been wondering why this girl went out of her way to save Toothless's skin. While I could have easily excused it as having relationship or some sort of friendship with the former Night Fury, Toothless had said that he wasn't really all that close to his peers outside of their duties as Squires. Now, I think knew the answer. She had a crush on him, on Fishlegs of all people. And the best part? Fishlegs probably had the same thing going on in his head.. I wonder if the two of them even realized this.

So, just when I had finally gotten used to the idea of dragons being like people, this shows up. Dragons and humans, falling in love with each otherâ€¦| and she'd been on this island for only a week.

"Ahem," I coughed. While I was happy to see that one of the few boys who did not have an obsession with me was finding love, that got in the way of some things. "There's something I need from you two."

"Uhâ€¦|what?" said Fishlegs.

And I told them. "I need you to keep the otherâ€¦| dragons," -since that was what they really were- "alive while Toothless and I are gone."

Meatlug bowed her head down. "Thank you," she said. They were her friends, too, I realize, probably closer to her than to Toothless. I guess when you start befriending dragons, you have to start taking into account a dragon's feelings on the matter.

Fishlegs, it seemed, was a bit anxious at what I had asked. "And just how are we supposed to do that?" I just shook my head. I just knew he'd be asking that. It was a fair question, because the task was seemingly impossible. Just how were a boy and a girl supposed to

convince the villagers from harming three captives? While the first one, the Nadder was safe for now, everyone just saw her as another animal, the two boys were being charged for conspiracy. The interrogation, whenever that happens to involve piping hot rods metal rods to force the answers out of them. And I was fairly sure they were not fire proof.

So I gave him my honest reply. "I don't know." And I didn't. The last time I had made a plan by myself, that was last night and I think everyone knows how that turned out. Really, it came down to whether or not Fishlegs can discredit me or find a way to let those boys free. "Just figure something out. I'm sure you'll think of something." And he was probably saner than Hiccup when it came to making ideas.

"And just what do I do if that doesn't work out?" pressed the boy, though I could tell he was more afraid of the consequences of failure.

"Then ask the twins to come up with something," I stated, feeling rather annoyed. This was the absolute last resort. If everything else failed, the twins would be the last line that Fishlegs could call upon. And it wouldn't be all that difficult either. They would leap at the chance to do chaos if they were simply asked. By all means, if there was ever a situation that needed their 'expertise', then whatever harm they could do was not as bad as what would happen if they did nothing.

There was also the option of just taking off the necklaces the two of them wore. Apparently, the jewelry was what allowed the dragons to assume human form. As long as they wore it, they were as human as I was. They couldn't do it themselves because they were bound in very small cages that were apart from each other. Alsoâ€| there was the disturbing image I had about only one half of a Zippleback changing back to its true form. The results were not pretty.

And there was asking Snotlout for help. And if things were bad enough to as for his assistance, well, I guess I was glad I was not going to be back for a while.

For a moment, I wondered if those same neckpieces could be used to return Hiccup to human form. And why was it that Toothless did not need one to stay human. I guess it has to do with the different sorceries and magics involved. I was no witch or socereress, no that was someone else's job.

"Odin help me," muttered Fishlegs, his face turning pale.

"Who's Odin?" asked Meatlug. "And how exactly does he help us?"

* * *

><p>Night had come sooner than expected and there was one thing Hiccup's father and I had in abundance other than grief and that was the lack of sleepless nights. While the older man was outside, somewhere in town doingâ€| chiefly thing I suppose, I sat at the writing desk, looking at the arcane tome before me. I wasn't really reading it, Hiccup had said the entry for the arrows, the entry I needed, wasn't even the right one and I could barely read what I had been given anyways. Fishlegs had said I was rather good at learning

Norse, but I still had a long ways to go before I was as proficient as the others. I just had the book there because I needed something to remind me of just how little I actually knew.<p>

I looked back at the times the arrows had come up, trying to wrack my brain over their secret. They had a function of some sort, but it was so inconsistent. Was it because of the alterations Hiccup made or was I missing some crucial piece of information?

First, the arrows, slightly reshaped to fit a different type of weapon, changed me into a human being. And I've been stuck in this form, this fragile and weak, but at the same time, flexible and comfortable human body.

Second, the arrows, still shaped in to a bolt pattern, heavily damaged the flesh of Alvin after having taken a potion that slowly consumed his body.

Third, the arrows did nothing against a Monstrous Nightmare, which eventually led to Hiccup's capture. We were hoping that the arrows, would work on the Nightmare the same way it worked on me, but their failure just threw us all off.

And lastly, I held up the pieces of a broken necklace. Whatever shape it was before, it was now indistinguishable, the golden metal was twisted and knotted. My fellow Squires used enchanted jewelry like this to assume human shape. When I stabbed the Nadder last night, this necklace broke into pieces and the Nadder resumed her true shape.

At first, when the whole thing with the Nightmare failed, we assumed that I simply lacked the ability to create the arrows. Camicazi tested creating the arrows and the potion and the directions were simple enough that there seemed no chance of failure, yet she and Alvin still had trouble using those specific sorceries. It was easy enough to assume that I was like them.

Except, I wasn't. Last night disproved that. I had some sort innate ability, like Hiccup to use the book's sorceries. I did not know why, but I had it. But this raised up more and more questions. Why was it that the transformed Nadder was affected, but not the Nightmare?

Did it have something to do with the shape of the arrows? Did making small adjustments here and there, such as just removing the feathers and using a thicker piece of wood produce vastly different results? Except that that did not account for the vastly different results even when the arrows or bolts were of the same category, or even of the same batch.

Maybe it had to do with the targets? Night Furies, I've always been told, were different from other dragons, mostly this mean _better,_ but maybe the arrows affect us differently than other dragons as well. Although, did that mean it affected different dragons differently?

But then, why did the jewelry explode in my face? And why was I stuck in this weak body seemingly indefinitely?

I clearly knew too little about what was going on. I was missing an important piece,

I looked over the information again. Of the times the arrows did _something_, was there one thing that they had in common? Well, the Nadder and I had been transformed in both cases, but Alvin had his flesh rot, so that did not help me. Alvin and I were struck by the same time of projectile, though in a different way, but that caused different results. In all of the times the arrows worked, they tended to destroy themselves, but that did not really tell me anything useful.

I struggled to find answers, learning little. The last thing I could think of was that Alvin and the Nadder were both under the effects of some sort of enchantment. Alvin drank a potion before hand and the Nadder wore the enchanted necklace. And in both those cases, the spells they were under likely undid themselves. But that did not explain why I changed.

Unlessâ€¦|

Before I could really delve into the matter further, I heard a knocking on the front door. It must have been Hiccup's father, coming home late from another late night of drinking. He had been doing that quite a lot ever since Hiccup had been taken from us. I hid the book under the writing desk. It was not exactly something I wanted to display out in public. I opened it, finding Astrid along with a girl that aside from her hair and choice of clothing, would have been her exact double. "Camicazi!" I said, recognizing her.

"Oi, Toothless. Long time no see," she chirped. I was glad to see her, it meant now we could go get Hiccup back home. The longer we waited, well, who knew what would happen? Still, I was not expecting the Bog Burglar to come by so soon. Though that assumed she got my letter.

"You get our letter?" I asked.

"Of course, I did," smiled the girl. "I heard someone took Hiccup, I say we steal him back." Her confidence was practically infectious. I felt we had a good chance of saving our mutual friend. Maybe, if things played out well, I could just speak to my Lord and ask him to simply release my friend.

Astrid nodded beside her double, she had her cheap hatchets drawn, showing she was ready for a fight. "It's time, Toothless," she said. "We're getting him back."

I nodded. "Let's." I reached down over to pick up a small leather bag with the Berk crest on it. I rummaged through the container, hoping my preparations were in order. I had plenty of rope and some various tools here and there to assist in climbing, the nest was quite mountainous. I added a cooking pot in case we got hungry. I also had a small, but crudely constructed crossbow I made myself; not as effective as my old one, but still, something I could use. Additionally, I had a few bolts, also of similar workmanship. None of them were special, though I did still have the remaining arrow from last night.

And lastly I had my secret weapon. It was secret because I was the only one who knew about it, I having not told Astrid or let Camicazi known in my letter to her. I brought with me the ingredients to forge

a potion, the one made from the parts of a dragon, if we need. I spent an hour or so today, haggling with twins to retrieve the last ingredient. That showed how important I thought it was to bring it with me. If the worst happened or if we needed more muscle, I would brew the potion and drink it. All it would take to create it was some water and five minutes. Ironically, I would assume my true form, not in the service of my Lord, but rather to fight against him.

"I'm ready," I said, finally.

I walked out the door, but not before leaving a small note, informing Hiccup's father that I had left, along with a promise to return his son home.

I looked over the cliffs, one last time, Astrid and Camicazi were right beside me. "I can't wait," said the Bog Burglar. "We get to be the first humans to set foot on Dragon Island."

I raised my eye brows at that. Really, that was the best name they could think about to refer to the Nest? Granted, upon thinking on it, calling my King's home the 'Nest' sounded just as bland. I guess it just went to show you that dragons and humans were both capable of creating the most generic sounds names for the same places.

"Say, why hasn't anyone found the dragon nest?" asked Astrid.

"Vikings have been trying to find it ever since we sailed here, so why haven't we been able to find it? How are we suppose to get there?"

"I know the way," I said. "All dragons, even the lowliest commoners, learn how to navigate through the area when we first learn how to swim. All I have to do is find the right seamarks."

"Seamarks?" Astrid asked. Apparently it was a proper word in my native tongue, but not in Norse.

"Yeah, like landmarks, only for the water," I said. All dragons had learn and memorize them when we were young, they all were specific markers that pointed one's relative location in the fog. A specific ship's head ornament pointing in the right direction, the shape of a particular archway; Vikings probably saw them, but never really understood their significance.

Plus I also knew the defenses used. The fog the permeated the region was something my King created and maintained. I do not know the exact mechanism for the fog's creation, but its purpose was clear. Viking ships would often run aground or hit sea stacks because of the low visibility. Additionally, it provided cover and concealment to any dragons who went to engage the ships. And well, it made it so much easier for the defenders to herd the Vikings away from the Nest. Getting to the island would rely on us making sure that none of the defenders knew we were coming. Part of the reason the Viking scouting parties failed was because they were also _invasion _forces, no hiding was involved.

"Excellent, you'll navigate, while I have my crew take us in!" chirped Camicazi as she headed in the direction of the docks. Once we were at the steep cliffs that led to the docks, the girl leapt off of ramps that led downwards because simply walking down was not fast enough for her. Astrid and I followed her, barely managing to keep up

with her energy.

"Wait, you have a crew?" I panted. While I knew that Astrid and I were planning to go to my King by boat, I had always assumed that Camicazi or Astrid would be enough to operate the ship. Really, if a boat was like flying, surely all you needed was to have a good understanding of the winds, right?

"Of course," said Camicazi. "Someone has to operate the getaway barge, one of the most important things to remember when planning to burglar someone." Was 'burglar' a word? I knew what a burglar was, but I don't think I heard of anyone using it as a verb. And what was that about a getaway barge anyways? I turned to Astrid, beseeching her for clarification.

"She's a Bog Burglar," she said, also managing to leap down after the ecstatic Bog. Really, I had to get into shape, this body of mine was so inept. Astrid turned and looked at me for a moment, just before making a leap. "It's just what they do." And the Astrid did a backflip off the ramp and landed squarely at the bottom, uninjured. I gave a brief whistle.

I arrived at the bottom an eternity later, in last place and exhausted. The girls had already went in the direction of one where the boat was located and that was not on the pier. See, since Astrid had said Trader Al was responsible for Hiccup's kidnapping, well, we did not expect the whole village to go up in arms when it came to the ports. There was a constant watch all over the place as Berk guards patrolled the ports. I only barely managed to elude one of them by hiding behind a barrel of fish.

Well, at least we told Camicazi we wanted to leave in secret anyways, so this did not change much, other than us having to be more careful about being watched. I followed the two girls, Camicazi. had her ship parked on a beach that was near the harbor, but far enough away from any wandering patrols. I had no doubt that if she got discovered, well, things would go from bad to really bad.

As I approached, I stopped moving and shiver went down my spine. I could feel my pulse quickening, my heart pounding. The darkness was suffocating. I did not want to know what lurker there, what hidden things that forsook daylight. I could not see a thing, I would be blind. I didn't want to move.

"Toothless!" I heard Astrid call out. "Come on, Toothless."

Suddenly, I was back to my senses, looking at down dark pier. I had to get a hold of myself. It was just darkness, just the night. And it was harmless. A Night Fury is not afraid of part of their own name sake. We were creatures of that darkness, creatures of the night. I was not afraid.

Except, my legs were still locked in place.

No, I had to do this... "I'm coming!" I yelled in response. I forced my feet forward, each step felt like my feet had been incased in ice. Slowly, but surely, I inched myself ever closer to a small wooden ship, my feet sinking into the sand and silt.

"What took ya' so long?" asked Camicazi.

"Nothing," I snappily replied. They shouldn't have to suspect anything. Whoever heard of a Night Fury afraid of the night? That would be preposterousâ€¦ then again, so was everything I have been doing for the past month.

I stepped up the gangplank and embarked on the ship. Though it was still dark, it was far easier to move when I had eyes watching me. I shook my head. I had to focus on what was at stake here, Hiccup needed me.

"Well, now that we have a guideâ€¦ All hands, report!" said Camicazi, gathering the attention of everyone aboard. What must have been a nearly a dozen sailors saluted their captain.

I noticed for a moment that all of them were female, mostly women and there was maybe a girl or two; all of them were noticeably older than Camicazi. And all of them were definitely bigger than me. I had heard from Hiccup that the Bog Burglars were an all female Viking tribe, but I never really understood what he meant until now. That just brought up a load of questions, like how they managed to make more of themselves. It was also then I realized thatâ€¦ Astrid was a girl. Strangely, it felt more alienating being the only boy, rather than being the only dragon.

"Now, ladies," Camicazi referred to the crew. Then she turned her attention to me and gave me a brief wink. I did not understand what that gesture meant. "And gentleman, we have a job to do. We leave, now." At this order, the women all prepared to man their positions, pulling on various ropes and using their muscles to row the ship forward. In only a moment, we were out of Berk's harbor.

Camicazi could only smile at the sight. I guess she liked being in a position of authority. "Uhâ€¦so who are these people?" I had already figured they were sailors and Bog Burglars, but I could not figure out why they were here or following Camicazi's beck and call.

"Oh them?" Camicazi laughed. "They're my personal handmaidens." Handmaidens? As in, servants? Well, I guess that made sense, she was an Heir after all. Thoughâ€¦ I don't think I ever heard of servants

"Wait, you have handmaidens?" asked Astrid. "And a ship of your own? Since when?" That was a good point, from what I understood, ships were quite expensive. Viking longships required a series of complex and specific designing to make them sturdy and sea worthy, from bending the oak planks so that the overlap and placing bee's wax to seal up the hull, they were not cheap by any means. Andâ€¦ I didn't think Camicazi had that much money on her own.

"Well, mum decided to give me a little present ever since Alvin went dragon," chirped Camicazi. "Isn't she a real beaut? I still haven't decided on the name, but she's fast and light, a nice scouting ship if I do say so myself. Even came with her own crew, handpicked by mum."

Suddenly, I felt my preparations might not be all that impressive.. I mean come on, all I brought was just a stupid bag full of stuff just anyone could bring, Camicazi was bringing not only her own ship with

an attached crew, but also her expertise at stealth and thievery. Well, I guess I could say that Astrid brought less stuff, but honestly, she probably didn't need to bring anything other than an axe.

Although, if we still managed to save Hiccup, I didn't care as much about what I brought, over than actually succeeding. All I wanted was my friend to be back where he belonged.

"Right, so, how long we going to sail?" If this was by flying speed, I would say it would take maybe half an hour; boats however were much slower than flying. Sure they might have been comparable in many ways, but flying was much faster.

Camicazi replied. "Oh, I'd say maybe an hour or two before we hit the fogbank. You know, it's kind of funny Berk's always been so close to your nest."

I blinked. Yeah, now that I thought about it, Berk was rather close to my King's Domain. Really, it must have been crazy for those humans to settle so close to hostile territory. I guess Vikings have stubbornness issues. And well, we dragons are smart enough. Though, that could have just been merely coincidence.

I looked out to the horizon, imaging for a moment that we were closer to our destination than we really were. I was not going back a hero or a Knight, I was coming back as a thief and a betrayer. But Hiccup had been like a brother to me, it was only fair I tried to save him. I owed it to him. And well, my King just had to understand that I paid my debts in full.

* * *

><p>I awoke from my dreams, having spent the daylight on a short, but comfortable sleep. I had some really good dreams last morning, mostly, I was just remembering my younger days as a hatchling and the games I had played with my brother. I remembered some joyous things such as our first flying lessons, taught to us by our mother. I remember laughing a little as my brother vomiting on mother and his subsequent punishment of being bathed by her. I remember the practice and joy as we shared as learned to use our Breath together. I remember the simple joy my brother had every morning where he would try to imitate a rooster crowing before sleeping.<p>

I remember all of these things quite vividly and fondly, as if these memories were fresh in my mind.

I had approached the mouth of the den, examining things for only a moment. There pile of fish was scattered over the floor. Unusually, there were two piles, instead of just the one mother typically had. One of them was mostly eaten though, with only a few scant remains, while the other seemed virtually untouched. Could that mean it was meant for me? I didn't deserve it.

"Eat, child," I heard a voice say behind me. It was mother again. "Your training will begin once you have eaten your fill."

I turned around, looking at her, a bit afraid. "Y-yes mom." Well, it couldn't have gotten any worse than the one I had with myâ€| cousinâ€| a Nightmare. How exactly did I have a Nightmare for a

cousin anyways? Was it a 'by law' thing?

I cautiously bent down and picked a fish. "No, child," she said. "Use your mouth."

At her words, I had caught on to the fact that my left paw had gripped onto the fish. No, that was improper, impolite. I dropped it then and there. "Sorry, I forget sometimes." Mother just gave a sigh and a look that implied some frustration. I bent down and ate a fish from my pile. And then another. And then another. And another after that. It feltâ€¦ odd eating so much. But that couldn't be right, right? I mean, I very clearly remember eating atleast a dozen fish with every meal. It wasn't that odd was it?

It probably didn't matter, but I had lost my appetite.

I looked up, noticing in the corner of my eye that mother was eying me, observing me intently. There was a strange look in her eyesâ€¦ Worry, maybe? No, wait, that was impossible. Those eyes narrowed into slits when she realized I was looking at her. No, it was definitely not, I was just imagining things.

"I'm done eating," I said.

"Good," she said. "Then we can begin." I was excited, what would be our first lesson? Would I be learning how to shape by Breath into stronger or more powerful forms? Would I be learning the advanced flying techniques? Or maybe aerial combat? How about knowing towers were the important ones? Well, obviously the ones with catapults on themâ€¦ but what were catapults? Well, catapults areâ€¦ Herd devices that throw heavy stones through the use of weights and tension on wood. There was also the trebuchetâ€¦ But how do I know all that? I shook my head. No, those â€¦ words had no meaning. I was making up words to describe things the Herd builtâ€¦ exceptâ€¦. where have I seen them before.

I forced myself free from those thoughts, just in time for mother to have one of those odd looks again. It disappeared just as quickly. "I'm ready, mom," I said. "What're you going to show me?"

"Fire breathing," she said promptly. "Show me what you can do."

I nodded, eager to please. It would be so simple, all I had to was to show her the largest and most destructive blast I could manage. I turned towards an empty space in the den and let loose a single blast of fire. Except, what came out were little embers of flame, not a congealed mass of heated and concentrated firegas. I shot again. Still nothing changed. What was I doing wrong? Even little whelpings could do better than I did. And I very clearly remember using fire just a few weeks agoâ€¦ but on metal for some reason. And there I go making up words again.

I looked at mother, careful and wary of her reprisals. Though, Mother did not seem the least bit concerned that her son was spitting out fire weakly. "I'm sorry, I just don't know what's wrong with me," I said.

"There is nothing wrong with you, child," said mother. "You were merely weak for far too long." I tried to think back, trying to understand. I had been weakened? Did I have an accident, an

affliction that I simply do not remember? Maybe that had something to do with my brother being accepted into the Knighthood before me, I was after all, the older sibling. Usually, the younger ones did things after the older ones, but not me, for some reason.

I decided maybe to ask mother about it another time, but I decided to point out there was, indeed, something wrong with me. "So there's nothing wrong with an adolescent Night Fury being unable to use his Breath, right?"

My mother just growled. "Do not test me, my son. What I say is true and that is that." I backed away for a bit, hoping we would not come to blows. Mother, instead seemed to calm down a bit. "You are fine, my son, you must justâ€¦" she waved her tail at me.

"You just pointed to all of me," I said, trying to understand the gesture.

"Yes! That's it! You are Night Fury, strong and able. You should quit doubting in the power that is rightfully yours." This conversation felt as familiar as it was one-sided, though I felt things were a bit different. Though, who exactly did I have a conversation with again? I couldn't remember, but maybe he was just a commoner or someone I knew.

I took in a deep breath. Trying to build the Breath in my chest. I tried to recall the lessons I had before, I mean I couldn't have forgotten what I had known, right? I had a very clear image in my memory of how to create a proper flame, but for some reason, my throat was not doing things properly. It opened and closed at the wrong moments, failing to build the required pressure to shape the flame.

Eventually, I couldn't keep it contained for much longer. I breathed out a small, bright sphere that only released a few embers on impact with the surrounding at best.

"Better, but you still lack the finesse and the required force behind it. You'll never manage to slay anyone with that," commented mother. Then what was wrong with me? My wings and tail were drooped down in disappointment. I was failing at some of the most basic things. Even my best efforts were below that of even mere hatchlings, but why? Mother seemed to notice this. "Child, you may be weakened for now, but in time, you will grow to your full strength." I eased up as my muscles became less tense as I listened to these words.

"Right," I said.

"Go then, perhaps we might try again later tonight," said mother. I agreed. Maybe I wasn't cut out for Breath lessons just yet. Thought that made little sense.

I stepped outside. There was a number of Kin who were gathered outside the den, mostly familiar faces and scents I had seen from the night before. Their heads were all bowed as I made my way through them, each giving me a salute and congratulation to my new appointment. It was no secret mother intended to make me a Squire under her wings. It was justâ€¦ uncomfortable having my Kin bow to me, I just couldn't explain why.

Maybe I just wasn't used to having fans.

"Night Fury," said a couple of dragons as they approached me, most of them Nadders. "Would you like to fly with us?"

Yeah, an hour or two flying to clear my head. I mean, just because I didn't know how use my Breath right did not mean I could not fly, right? Yes, that sounded good. I accepted the offer with a nod. My Kin then took off, each making a running start and extending their wings off the ground, the only exception were the Gronckles whose wings allowed them to fly from a standing position.

Grinning to myself, I gave a quick sprint. With a leap, I extended my wings. I felt the wind gather beneath my wings, each catching a the air around them to lift me up. I flew except, I was not getting any higher. I descended, the wind beneath my wings petering out. I panicked, I had to get higher. I motioned my wings to work, flapping them.

It had the opposite effect. I panicked even more, struggling to get as much altitude as possible. The only thing in vision right before I crashed was rock a large rock.

"Night Fury!" I heard my Kin scream and give shouts of concerned terror.

I almost wish I was unconscious as my head had a splitting. I gave a groan of pain as I picked myself up, clutching my head with my paw. I was hurt. Well, at least, if I could meet my dad again, I could tell him that I rammed by head into a stone and have it split in two except I did not have a father, brother and I never knew him. No, that was just something mother said my father did.

"Are you alright, Night Fury?" said one of the Nadders.

"He's bleeding," another one of my Kin said.

I lifted my paw off my head. It was wet and coated with a dark liquid, blood, my blood. I was bleeding. I had a head injury. Hopefully, I would not end up like Bucket that was an odd name what was a bucket, again? There I go making up stuff, again. Why was I doing that.

"Does it hurt?"

"Very," I replied dryly. "Now if you excuse me, I'm going to pour sea water into the wound." Mother was not going to like this. Knowing her, she might decide to make an example of one of the Nadders who asked me to fly. I had to do something, hide the evidence. I wandered over to the ocean and placed my head wound. It hurt worse, salt tended to agitate wounds for some reason, but this was partially balanced out by the icy cold waters deadening the pain. That did not matter so much, I just needed to wash away the blood. But, then the pain stopped, almost as quickly as it came.

I pulled my head out of the water, noticing the odd looks that everyone gave me and listening into the whispers. "Why couldn't he fly?" "What was he doing? That injury should have been tended to by a healer." "Dead Wings is not going to like this once she sees that wound."

I approached them warily. Gossip was the worst, but I had to put up with it even here, I guess. But where was I before then? No, that can't be right.

One of the braver Kin, a old Gronckle with damaged, but recovering wings approached me. He seemed familiar. "The woundâ€¦ it's gone," he gave a shout of astonishment and disbelief.

"Yeah," I said nonchalantly. "I tend to heal quite quickly." It did not save me from the pain I feltâ€¦ and â€¦ there was something else I did not like about it, but I couldn't quite remember what it was.

The rest of my Kin then took notice of this and responded accordingly. "But how?" "Is that a Gift from the King?"

I shook my head. "No, I just â€¦ drank somethingâ€¦" I forgot what thoughâ€¦ there were plenty of things I was forgetting lately, like actually knowing how to fly. How was I supposed to forget something that I would be using every day?

"What a potent drink it must have been then," said the old Gronckle. I nodded, I guess he could say that. "It is marvelous," I could see my Kin give me silent nods of agreement. Well, at least they were not saying how incompetent at flying I was, so that was a plus.

"It stills hurts," I gave a bitter chuckle. And, it did. Very, very much. My Kin joined me in laughter, yeah, it felt good. Though, the only Gronckle was very familiar, the face and the wing injuries just stuck out to me, but I could not attach a time and place before.

"Have we met before?" I asked.

The Gronckle gave me a brief sniff as if to confirm a few things. I did the same. He did not smell familiar, but I could recognize the other feature quite well. "Yes, we have," said the wizened Kin.

"Where?"

"Back when I was still captured by thoseâ€¦ beasts." I nodded, trying to recall back then.

"Yes, I remember now." He and other Kin were captured by the Herdâ€¦ and I had taskedâ€¦ a Changewing to help me break them free, along with many of the Herd who were also imprisoned, but why did I do that again? No, it did not matter what they were. They still deserved to be freed, Herd or Kin, no one deserved the fate thatâ€¦ Alvin the Treacherous had given them. But wait, the Herd had names of their own? My head was spinning and it was not because I had rammed my head into a hard stone and poured sea water into it.

I also rememberâ€¦ brother and I were not in our right forms, for some reason. He had fully become one of the Herd and I was slightly less. And we both sought a way to return things to normal. But why were in those forms again?

"Are you alright, my son?" said my mother as she approached. The

crowd was either frozen in place or ran as far away as they could. It was a well known fact that parents could be quite protective of their children, mine tended to be quite extreme in that regard.

"Uh, yeah," I lied, best hope no one got killed. I mean, most of the evidence I had been injured had washed away into the sea and I no longer had a head injury. "I'mâ€¦ just thinking on thingsâ€¦"

"Yes, the King gave you plenty to think about," agreed my mother. Did she know then of what's been bothering me lately? "Do not worry, my child, everything will make more sense to you in time." She reached down and placed a paw on my head. Hopefully, she did not know. "And you will be strong, my child. And the world is ruled by those who have the will and the strength to command it. And you will have those things, all you must do is grasp them." Yes, I saw that. I had the power, the power to say that I was _something_, not a weakling.

And then, mother just walked away, nothing else happened. No murderous looks, no beatings, no nothing.

My Kin gave me confused and bewildered looks, as if they had seen something that just should _not_ have happened, yet did. I couldn't blame them, I was in the sameâ€¦ boat? I guess if I keep making up words, I might as well stop fussing about it. "Did anyone else see that?" said a curious Nightmare, the rest of my Kin gave silent nods agreement. "Since when did Flight Commander Dead Wings doâ€¦ that?"

"Uhâ€¦ yeahâ€¦." I said. "I'm kinda weirded out by it, too." I mean, she _did_ have a reputation around the Nest for being very aggressive and being quite frightening to be around. Most of my Kin probably never seen her give much in the way of compassion, except for when I was around. Why exactly was she actingâ€¦ differently? I just shook my head. "I think I just need some time for myself."

My Kin gave a silent bow. "Then we shall see you another time, my liege," said one old, wizened Gronckle. Did he just do what I think he did? I might have been a Squire, no scratch that, no, a _potential_ Squire who lacked the ability to fly or use his Breath correctly, and yet, the old Gronckle was already calling me his liege, as in, that he was pledging me his loyalty. Andâ€¦ there were others who gave similar shouts of praise.

I just felt like I could do no wrong. Things were looking up in the world. "Yeah, I'll see you all later," I replied as I headed off.

I spent my time finding myself a quiet place amongst some stones. No Kin were around me, and I enjoyed the momentary silence. Tonightâ€¦ was quite confusing. On the one hand, I was unable to do the most _basic_ things that I should know, on the other, I had gained followers for no other reason than just by showing up. I kept having strange thoughts, unusual words or ideas poking themselves in head, but mother said it'd get easier in time. I was weak now, but she promised me I would get stronger.

Although, I can't shake the feeling that something wasâ€¦ amiss. Like where was my brotherâ€¦ or any of my friends? Why weren't they here? They should learn about my recent promotionâ€¦ maybe I could impress the Nadderâ€¦

Then, off in the distance, I spotted, something. It was an object of some sort, probably quite larger than a Nightmare based on the distance. If I were a Breed of Kin that spent most of its time in the daylight, my eyes would have failed to pick it up, but there it was. Dim moonlight bathed the object as it approached the shore and landed in the soft sands. It wasâ€¦ a wooden cave that floated upon water. Two words hung to mind, shipâ€¦ and boat.

Some of the Herd were upon it, almost all of them female. I hid myself from their view as they disembarked the so called 'boat', my dark scales blending seamlessly with the darkness that surrounded me. The one Herd that was notâ€¦ femaleâ€¦ was a dark haired boy, one whose face I only a moment to recognize as someone important to me. A single word escaped my lips, "Brother."

* * *

><p>As a hatchling, I have always been told that the reason that none of the Herd ever set foot on the Nest was because our enemies were simply too stupid to understand the complexity of the defenses and the stratagems the Knights employed. Now that I had seen humans and had become one myself for myself, I knew the real reason was because simply could not see anything. Nada, nothing. The fog's thickness and the time of night conspired to form an all pervasive concealing barrier. It did not matter as much for us dragons because we had our other senses to make up for the lack of poor visibility, But humans were not blessed with sharp and discerning noses or sharp ears to see in the dark with; they simply could not see where they were going. Really, if it were not for the fog created by my King, the humans would have found the Nest a long time ago. How that would have ended was anyone's guess, though I imagine my Lord could swallow a whole legion.<p>

Unfortunately, that meant that because none of us were dragons, right now, none of us could see very far. That made it difficult for me to spot the right seamarks to guide the way. But as luck would have it, we were on course, only a stone's throw away from exiting the fog bank that protected our destination, indicated by a longship that had run aground. I could only imagine the sheer confusion and hopelessness of Viking sailors who desperately tried to navigate this place, they were blind and traveled a way they had no idea how to navigate, all the while being hounded by my superiors; I was cheating, I already knew where to go.

I gave Camicazi and herâ€¦ women a direction to lean slightly to the left, around a stone pillar. And then, the fog cleared. For some strange reason, the fog never really seemed to permeate the island where it came from, though that could have been a result of it being more than just normal fog. We had arrived at our destination.

Camicazi and Astrid both gave identical expressions at awe as they saw the King's Nest.

"Oh my," mutter Camicazi. "That'sâ€¦ a wee bit bigger than I expected." I nodded.

"How are we supposed to find Hiccup?" Astrid asked me.

Upon thinking on it, I had realized just howâ€¦ big the Nest was,

especially since none of us could fly. Even discounting the forests and beaches that the island had and focusing on just the volcano where the King resided, Hiccup could have been anywhere in it. And just how many of those places were only accessible by flying? Maybe I should have thought this through a bit moreâ€¦ "Uhâ€¦ we're not," I said, honestly. Astrid and Camicazi had their eyes furrowed in frustration. I kind of deserved it. I decided to come up with an alternate solution, "We'll parlay with my King for his releaseâ€¦" â€¦And hopefully obtain forgiveness from the Terror, though I could probably live without it so long as I had Hiccup back.

"So, you want us to parlay with a dragon?" said Astrid, skeptical. She had planned this out to be a rather straight forward rescue. It occurs to me that I had only informed Hiccup about my King.

"My King is not merely a normal dragon," I said, trying to explain clearly. "He'sâ€¦ powerful." Merely calling him 'big' was not enough to convey the right meaning.

"Yeah, do you realize how mad that is?" said Astrid, "If he is so powerful, he might decide to kill us. We're better off following Camicazi's advice to sneaking."

"My King won't hurt us, so long as we can get an assurance for safe passageâ€¦" I said. The Code of Hospitality was universal, it seemed, being in both dragon and human cultures. The exact wording of the protocols differed, but the idea was still the same, Guests were protected. Unfortunately, I was not going to like how we were going to be invited.

"And just how are we supposed to get that?"

"From my motherâ€¦" All Flight Commanders had the authority to grant what I desired and given that Hiccup was likely a very important captive, she would likely know where he is. While I know the two of us are not exactly on the best of terms, she was still my mom. "Just land us here and I'll take us to her." Although, I still haven't worked out the issue of communicating with herâ€¦ I mean, would she be able to understand me? I'd consider the Terror or his Flight, but I don't think he's fond of me right now.

Astrid begrudgingly accepted my plan of action with only a nod.

Camicazi though, seemed rather intrigued by the idea of engaging in draconian politics. "Well, you heard the boy, land us, now."

The landing was smooth and quiet, the hull of the ship must have been crafted specifically to reduce noise. The sailors grabbed their weapons and lay quiet, guarding the vessel, while Astrid, Camicazi, and I disembarked. We had our weapons sheathed, but they could be drawn at a moment's notice; our other equipment stored in our packs. It was now or never.

Our only light was that of the waning moon, obscured only slightly the dragons that flew overhead. We clung to the shadows as the lesser land bound predators did, the darkness giving us our greatest and only protection. I may have hated the dark, my fear of being of burned alive was far stronger.

I led my friends for what must have been at least half an hour, the ship we had taken no longer visible in the night. Even worse, the silent trek through the beach was only a quarter done, maybe if we cut through the forests, it would have been shorter, but we'd risk greater chance of discovery otherwise. Most dragons lived in the forest, the beaches were mostly reserved for activities, rather than as primary shelter. But our route was more or less set at this point.

My heart skipped a beat when I heard the words: "Did you hear that?" from Astrid's lips. That could not be good.

I shook my head. I didn't, No, my human ears were quite terrible all things considered.

"Something's approaching us," agreed Camicazi. "Ooh, I hope it's a dragon, that would be fun." I cringed, there was nothing fun about that. If we were discovered, well, we'd be regarded as intruders, not that my plan of going to my mother would fare any better.

My friends and I drew our weapons ready, on the off chance that whatever was stalking us was dangerous.

I saw something big and moving quickly across the sand ahead of us. I kept my crossbow trained on it for as long as I could before it disappeared behind a rock.

"Over there!" Camicazi spouted, her sword trained on the target before us.

"No, over there!" Astrid said, two hatchets in her hands. She also was tracking our enemy.

Eventually, our backs towards each other, an attempt to give us as much vision as possible. Whatever it was, it was big and fast. "Definitely a dragon," I muttered. I just did not know what kind of dragon.

And then, the dragon, whoever he was approached us, leaping up to a rock, eyes glaring at us. Now I could see the faint silhouette of a Night Fury. Olive green eyes locked towards me. "Motherâ€¦" I said to the figure. Worst case scenario, my mother would rip out my throat. Best case, well, there was no best caseâ€¦

Instead whoever our opponent was simply laughed. "I got you good, bud," his voice clearly male. The Night Fury leapt off the rock, revealing himself to us, his teeth exposed in a large grin. The word 'bud' did not really exist in the dragon tongue, instead the Night Fury used a shortening of a word that meant 'partner' or 'comrade'. The indented meaning was not lost to me.

I think froze in place, upon realizing who was before me. I wanted to say something, to ask a question, to confirm my suspicions, all I could say was a single word, "Hiccup?"

The dragon gave me an inquisitive look, as if understanding, yet not. Did he not recognize his own name? Orâ€¦ was this an entirely different dragon all together? I really hoped it was the later. "What's that, brother? It sounds... familiar, but I can't remember why." Heâ€¦ understood me, that was not a good sign. For some reason

I could not quite understand, having been a dragon before automatically made it so I could understand dragon speech. The same might apply to humans who had become dragonsâ€¦ Which likely meant this was who I thought it was. Also, he considered me his brother. I mean, unless my mother had left a sibling to my father, whoever he is, I really doubted I had anyone else other than my mother. So if this was Hiccup, then what happened to him?

"Is that Hiccup?" voiced Astrid, clearly lost. She couldn't understand the conversation I was having, but it seemed Hiccup did not seem to care about the fact we were talking in different languages.

I nodded. "I think he might be."

"Great, we can just take him and run!" said Camicazi.

"But I am home," interrupted the dragon we believed to be our captured friend. Yes, he definitely understood human speech. I relayed each of his words to Astrid and Camicazi. "Mother has chosen me to become a Squire," he cheered. Things were definitely confusing enough. "Come on, brother, I remember you've wanted to return to your true form so badly. The same can be done for you too, Changewing and Nadder. Maybe we can find you all help so that you may assume your rightful forms."

"He thinks I'm a Nadderâ€¦" muttered Astrid, clearly displeased.

"Well, I'd imagine being a Changewing isn't so bad," said Camicazi. "But what's with him?"

"I think I might have an ideaâ€¦" I said. I recall there once being a service my King performed on retired Knights who had experienced far too much fighting to live outside of the service. The King would enter their minds and slowly, over a period of time, alter the memories of the subject to suit their new role, sometimes resulting in drastic personality changes. I had once heard of a particularly violent Nightmare becoming a very timid and passive being. I heard that often times, that during the transition between the older set of memories to the newer one tended to be quite messy, and the subjects often confuse things from both sets. But thing wasâ€¦ this was a voluntary operation. You had to choose to undergo that treatment. And I seriously doubted that Hiccup choose to do this. Did my King force this upon him? But why? That went against the Law. The King never broke the Law. "I'll tell you guys later, we just have to get him home first." The other two nodded at my suggestion.

"Hiccup," Astrid said. "You're not really a dragon."

"And you're not my brother!" I said. As much as close as were as friends, we simply could not be brothers, neither of us had a blood relation to the other. That the simple and immutable fact of the matter.

"But you are my brotherâ€¦" said Hiccup as his tailfins and wings drooped over. He approached me and gave me a brief lick, a gesture of affection common to us dragons. "Remember flying lessons when you vomited on mother? I also remember what she decided to punish you with." Okay, that wasâ€¦ just wrong. I never told him about _that_,

yet he knew about that one time.

"What did he say?" asked Astrid, when I did not relay Hiccup's statements.

"I'd rather not talk about it," I said. I turned my attention back to the Night Fury before me. "Hiccup, we're not brothers, you never grew up with me."

The dragon's appearance seemed to falter a bit further. I wasâ€¦ breaking his heart with my words. I had to do this. "Butâ€¦ I remember."

"What you remember is a lie!" I shouted, causing the Night Fury to recoil back. "You are my friend, Hiccup. We are _not _brothers."

"Why do you keep calling me that?" said the dragon.

"Because it's _your_ name," I said. The dragon stared intently into my eyes, maybe I was getting through to him.

Then I felt a force slam against my chest, knocking me tumbling into the sand. I coughed out the contents of my mouth, wondering what hit me. I saw another Night Fury, one much larger than Hiccup. "Mom!?" was all Hiccup could manage to say.

Mother had appeared, seemingly out of nowhere.

Astrid and Camicazi charged at my mother, weapons in their hands. With a flick of her tail, mother launched sand into the girls' faces, blinding them momentarily. A moment was all the older Night Fury needed to knock the two to the sandy ground. As one might figure out, mother was an expert at tail fighting.

"Mother," I said with a bitter toneâ€¦ And just when I was thinking we would not have to deal with her, after all.

She looked at, obviously displeased. "Stop confusing your brother, my child," she snapped at me. Well, at least she knew who I was and she could understand me. Thoughâ€¦ why was she able to understand my Norse?

"He's not my brother," I responded. "He doesn't belong here."

"He is your brother," mother insisted. "And he does belong here, with us." That caused me some confusion.1 Mother believed Hiccup was her son? Did the King forcibly alter her as well? Was it because she was the only adult Night Fury around?

"What are you talking about?" I asked her. We couldn't be brothers, we justâ€¦ couldn't. In the moment mother was distracted, I could see Astrid trying to crawl over to her axes. I decided to pretend not notice, hopefully I could keep mother busy on me. "Why can't he remember anything about his old life, his _real _life?" I just looked at Hiccup, who stared intently at mother.

"Go my son, this matter does not need to concern you just yet," said my mother to her so-called _son._ Whatever she had to say, she did not want him to hear.

"But mom."

"Leave," was the only word mother needed to stay. She was not going to take any more insubordination tonight, it seemed.

Hiccup looked at Astrid and Camicazi, for a moment, each of them on the ground. "Justâ€¦ please, don't hurt them, they're my friends."

Mother gave sigh. "I'll try not to, my child." And then Hiccup went away, leaving us three humans at the mercy of one Night Fury. Why was she so insistent on calling refering to him as if he really was her son?

"It was my decision," said mother as she approached me, convinced Hiccup was away. "It is better for him not to regret the loss of his old life, just I have. He should not have to suffer from what can no long be his." I blinkedâ€¦ just wait. She had an old life? And she _chose_ to have Hiccup's mind altered for him? But what gave her the authority to do that?

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

At the same time, Astrid charged at mother again, hoping to catch her off guard. She wasn't. Mother ducked away from where the blow landed and followed up with another leg sweep. This time, Astrid fell to the ground, face first. Mother continued by placing a paw squarely on the shield maiden's back. She glanced at Camicazi, who was planning much to do the same as Astrid, with a silence promise to end the Hooligan's life should she raise arms against her. The Bog Burglar dropped her sword to the ground, upset.

Then mother did something, completely unexpected. She used her free paw's claws to make an inscription in the sand, right infront of Astrid's face. It wasâ€¦ something in Norse, based on the shape of how the runes were made. At this distance, with poor lighting, and the fact it was upside down, I could not read it for myself, especially since I was still a novice at the languageâ€¦ yet Mother clearly knew how to _write _in Norse. Dragons did not do that. Just what exactly was going on?

"Read it," said mother.

Astrid probably not understand the growling, so I followed it up by asking her to read for me. "What's it say."

"It saysâ€¦ Valhallaramaâ€¦" said Astrid.

I had no idea what that meant or how significant it was, so I asked Astrid. "What's so important about?"

Astrid spent a few moment trying to breathe. My mother's hold on her was probably quite strong. "That's the name of Hiccup's motherâ€¦" she said.

"And it was my name for a time. There is no equivalent of it in our Kin's language, so have adopted the moniker Dead Wings," said mother.

Now I began to understand why she had the authority to have Hiccup's mind altered. While most matters often required personal consent, there was one exception to that. In our Law, parents had the right to overrule their children who were under a certain age on any and every matter. Because she was legally allowed to decide such an important matter for him, that meant that that part of the law applied.

Then if that was true and her name used to be 'Valhallarama', the same name of Hiccup's mother... then, Hiccup really was my brotherâ€|

* * *

><p>Yeah, so I'm pretty sure I just blown everyone's mind with that plot twist. I want you guys to read between the lines for some of the earlier chapters, specifically in some of the Toothless snippets in the beginning before he got his name and really think about what I've been implying. I know that this might be a bit clichÃ©, but hey, I hope I pulled it off epically.

I'm pretty sure there are loads of questions about just what exactly has been going on. I assure you, there will be answers to them eventually.

A funny thing I noticed when I started writing this chapterâ€| that Toothless and Astrid have something of an bond. Not saying a shipping or pairing, but they've had lots of good meaningful interaction together.

On the note of pairings, I hatched a crack ship that can only exist in a Transformation Story: Fishlegs and Meatlug. Seriously, if there was transformation in the show, it would be a plausible shipping, given their relationship. I decided, why not see how that would pan out.

Also, notice the absolute lack of useage of the word Kin by Toothless, while conversely Hiccup uses nothing else.

"Burgal" is not a typo, but rather what I imagine Camicazi would say.

There is a certain irony for a Night Fury to have a fear of the dark. As to why it affects him so bad and just recently, well, I'll have to explain it another time and in proper context.

17. Chapter 17

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

So, there you guys have it. Probably one of the biggest plot twist in the whole fandom possible. It's really easy to see Hiccup and Toothless having brotherly relationship, but really, I've wondered what would it be like if they really were long lost brothersâ€| And then see what kind of circumstances would have to take place for it to be possible.

**For those who only know of the movies, her original name is "Valhallarama" in the book source material. The movie name 'Valka' is

just easier to say and rolls of the tongue better than the overly long original. Know that I wrote the first chapter before I learned Val was going to be the second movie and because I wanted to be consistent, I used her original name. **

No doubt that all of you are wondering her motivations or why she works with the King or even why she's a dragon in the first place. And at least three of you have voiced that you're wondering of who Toothless's father is. Well, most of that is revealed in this chapter.

Note that the Val portrayed here isâ€| understandably different what we'll see in the second movie. That one spent time isolated with the equivalent of giant fire breathing catsâ€| the one in this story faces an entire developed culture that accepted her.

For now, enjoy the chapter below. Let's hope 18 does not take 3 weeks to write.

P.S. Chapter 16 had a crazy number of reviews. I guess when you have a plot twist that absurd, people pay attention to it. Wonder if that'll be topped by this chapter. Never know.

* * *

><p>I walked from mother and my friends, my four legs taking me slowly away, yet my heart remained behind. My worries, fears, and thoughts created invisibly bindings that held me behind. Why was my brother so insistent that we were not siblings? Why was he so insistent I was named the runt of the litter? Last I checked, I was the older brother and I wasâ€|slightly larger than him, though he was always the stronger of the two of us. I was the older one, that's how it's always been.

I showed him how to use his Breathâ€| upon metal? I showed himâ€| the parts of his wings withâ€| paws, but why was wood and beeswax involved? I shook my head. Why was everything so confusing? I know I taught him something, but I couldn't understand why it was so difficult to remember how it all happened.

And there were the Nadder and Changewing, while it was easy for me to know what they said, they acted as though they could not understand me at all. My brother had to act as an interpreter, repeating my words in a form they could understand, yet I recall having had conversations with them many times before. Why couldn't they understand me now?

In fact, why were my brother, the Nadder, and the Changewing in the shape of the Herd? I recall them as proud Kin, mighty and winged; yet why were they not? I had seen my brother take out one of those Herd towers in a swift dive. I seen the Changewing stealthily move around brutish Herd without their notice. I recall watching the Nadder throw herâ€| Mother called them axes, right? But why did she have those in the first place, when she would have spines? And then, there was the reason I was spying on the Nadder in the first place. I wasâ€| interested in her. Butâ€| why did I? I mean, just because there were no other Kin of my Breed did not mean I should seek out those of othersâ€| I mean that was improper right? Besides, she never had an interest in me anyways. I wasn't worthy of herâ€| even though I was a Night Fury.

My head throbbed from that contradiction. How was I unworthy? I was almost a Squire and better yet, I was born one of the greatest Breeds. If anything, she should have been seeking me out. So, then why did I think I was unworthy of her?

I walked over to the waters of beach, stepping forward as the waves receded. My feet sunk to the dark sand and silt, slowing my progress only a little. Dim moon and starlight were the only sources of light around, but that did not matter.

I don't exactly understand how my eyes worked, but no matter how dark it is, so long as there was at least a little light, they would glow, making it easier to see in the dark. It was this strange ability that allowed me to see my own reflection in the waves, only partially distorted by the movement of the water.

I saw my face, yet I could not help but feel I was looking into the face of a stranger. I touched my face with my paw, feeling round contours and smooth scale against my limb. It was my face, yet it felt soâ€¦ alien to me. I couldn't ever recall it being so rigid and smooth before, my memory instead gave me the idea of soft, tender flesh, unscaled andâ€¦ so pink. Why was I pink? No, _he _was pink. I was not Hiccup.

I reached my mouth, feeling for my sharp retractable teeth. Each was a jagged edge that was suited to biting into the slippery scaly hides of fish, the preferred diet of my kind. They automatically retracted when the jaw closed, yet all it would take to extend them was a thought. At least, I should have been able to, yet for some reason, I could not seem to force my teeth. Hmâ€¦ now that I thought about it, an outsider would probably think we, Night Furies, were toothlessâ€¦ just like my brother's name.

"Gah!" I screamed, my teeth suddenly deciding to pop out. I pulled my slightly bleeding paw from the wound. It wasn't bad or anything, it just hurt. Great, just great, another thing I was utterly a failure at; I couldn't even control my own teeth right. Way to go, Hiccup the Useless, you're just as bad atâ€¦

I paused, trying to understand what I had just thought of. I referred to myself as 'Hiccup' for some reason, just like my brother insisted who I was. And why did I automatically add 'the Useless' after that name? It wasâ€¦ strange, almost like I was rediscovering an old bad habit I had, yet forgot about. Was there something important about this name and about that title? All of it was familiar, yet I could not understand whyâ€¦

I sighed, looking at my reflection again. That name, for whatever reason, felt more familiar to me than my own face. I wondered for a moment, if I could try to attach an image to that name, something just to wonder for a moment.

I squinted my eyes at my image, trying to imagine it as this 'Hiccup the Useless' that would just not escape my thoughts. The first thing that changed was the eyes, they were as big or as yellow as my real eyes were and they this strange whiteness around its edges as was common in the Herd. Brown fur grew on the back of my head, covering up the scale, no, the skin, the pink, soft skin of a Herd adolescent, not the dark scale of my kind. I went through an imaginary list,

making a small change here and there, one step at a time transforming my reflection into the form of an overly skinny and pathetic boy.

With each additional change, I brought forth with me the ideas and concepts of weakness, of failure, of uselessness. He sought a name for himself. I conjured up images of the boy's repeated failings attempts at slaying my mother, each of them with a unique invention, a device to give him the strength that he lacked. I saw all of his failed attempts at wooing over this one girl's heart, one that strangely reminded me of the Nadder I knew. I felt his desperation, I felt his desire to become what he was not. He was scrawny, out of place in a world where even the Herd could tame seas, move mountains, and forests.

And that was what my own brother compared me to! I was not this boy! I was not a weakling! I did not want to be compared to the likes of that scrawny boy.

I broke the image, I shattering the water with an outraged paw. Seawater gushed into my face, returning my reflection to the what it should have been, me. And yet, I could not help but ponder, that the now gone illusionary image suited me perfectly; I was a terrible Night Fury, incapable of doing even the simplest tasks.

A question remained, why did I know so much of him, yet so little of myself? I keep stumbling over my own thoughts, thinking words that should not be, coming up with ideas that no other Kin really understood, and coming up with senseless ideas.

Maybe I needed to speak to my brother; I might be leaping to conclusions. He might not have been a Night Fury right now, but we were still brothers even if he denied in earlier. That and maybe the Nadder and the Changewing could tell me so long as mother did not kill them.

I turn back to the way I came, cautiously hiding behind large stones as I approached my mother and my friends. It was at time I wished I was smaller, maybe being around the size of this 'Hiccup' whoever he was would have made things easier for me. With my belly on the beach ground, I creeped steadily forward. I knew that I was disrespecting my mother's authority and if I was caught, there would be consequences but right now, I did not care so much. I wanted answers and I wanted to make sure my friends were still alive.

I arrived finding the Nadder firmly under my mother's paw. The Changewing was next to my brother, helping him to his feet. Well, they were still alive, so mother was at least keeping to her promise. I was far enough away that mother likely was not going to see me, not unless she decided to look in my direction. I tried not to think of that. Or worse smell me. I think I was downwind of her.

I could see some Kin overhead, yet none of them were intervening at the King's request. Just a moment before mother came along, the King had sent an order that no one should bother her. And no one dared disobey a direct order like that. I just did not know she was right behind me at the time, so I thought I would greet my brother. Though that brought up the question of how mother knew where my friends were. I only knew about them because of chance, yet she knew of our location somehow. Did the King tell her?

At the same time, mother said these words. "And it was my name for a time. There is no equivalent of it in our Kin's language, so have adopted the moniker Dead Wings." I raised my eyes at that. Mother had a different name before she was 'Dead Wings'? I had never heard of that before. I thought names were supposed to be given by the King.

There was an odd silence that soon followed, my brother clearly lost in thought. Something my mother had said was going through his mind and I could only guess as to what. Finally, he said something, "But Hiccup...can't be my brotherâ€¦ he's supposed to be human!" Human. Was that another term for the Herd? And well, if Hiccup was 'human', he wouldn't be a brother to my own, except my brother was also humanâ€¦ So did that mean, that my brother could not be my brother?

Mother seemed saddened by my brother's words, so much so that she let her grip go on the Nadder's chest, enough so that she could roll out of the way. She still made it quite clear she could strike at the slightest hint of defiance. The Nadder went close to my other two friends, guard up. "This is the truth, I was once a _Herd_, _female,_" said mother, with very bitter emphasis on the words. "Not anymore. I gave up that life."

My brother seemed quite shocked about this news; I was, too. My mother was supposed to be one of the Herd? That'sâ€¦ definitely not what I was expecting. Brother tried deny it, "But you can't be humanâ€¦ If you areâ€¦ then what happened? Why did you give up on it."

"The same reason I never speak about your father," spat mother, a bitter tone.

"My father?" Our father. Suddenly, an image of a large and heavily red furred Herd male popped into my vision. He kept looking out to see, watching and waiting for something, weariness filling his eyes. Who was this person? Was he someone Hiccup knew? "What about him? I've always thought he left us, like most males did."

Mother shook her head. "No, I left him, doing the same thing I always had. A quest here and there, a treasure to be found over yonder. Once I was freed from caring for your brother, I left him with your father while I went questing, unknowing that I would be bearing a second child, you. Mostly, I just wanted some time away from him, we had aâ€¦ disagreement before I left."

My brother lay silent for a moment, the Nadder and the Changewing looked at him cautiously, an odd look in their eye. "About what?" he asked.

"â€¦ That is an answer for another time," said mother before continuing with the rest of her tale. "And on one of these adventures, me and several others were transfigured into the shape you see before you. And with me, you came out my body as an egg shortly afterwards. It was the first I had known I would have a second child, of having youâ€¦ I was scared at time, yes, child, I know, I fear things. Even to this day, I still have things I fear..." Somehow, the idea of mother being scared justâ€¦ sent shivers up my spine. Let's be honest, she was the scariest Kin on the Island,

excluding the King, of course.

"Then when your father came to search for our ship, he could not recognize us!" Mother spoke those words with such venom that it practically stung my ears. "I tried to speak to him, to carve runes for him to read. I even tried to bring armor to him to know who I was. But he had always been so distrustful of dragons, never bothering to really understand that dragons were more than just beasts for us to slay. That distrust prevented him from seeing what was right in front of him. All he saw was just another trophy on his wall!" Mother's yell could probably be heard for miles; it seemed she was really, really upset with father.

Calming down with a few deep breaths, mother spoke once more, "He attacked me along with the rest of my! Flight, will suffice for this. Few of us survived, others ran for their lives! and I was left alone with your egg."

"My husband betrayed me, he is no better than the other miserable wretches who we equate to livestock. I did your brother a favor by freeing him from that old life of his. Once he is done, it will be as though he had been raised alongside us, just as it should be. He is better off amongst us."

My heart skipped a beat. Brother was right, my memories were a lie! Suddenly, I began to understand why I know so much about this! strange boy and why my brother kept insisting I was him, because I really was! I was Hiccup the Useless. And was just as useless as every bit I saw that boy was. I stepped into view, showing myself. "Hiccup!" said my friends unison.

"My son!" mother spat. "Disobedient child, I told you, this does not concern you!"

"Mother," I said! Well, she really was my mother, though I don't think Hiccup ever knew her. Though, all of my memories of her were a fabrication, a lie; an accurate fabrication, an accurate lie, undoubtedly, but they were not real. "I overheard you talking about me!"

Mother visibly had her wings and ears droop over in an expression of lament, though it lasted only a moment, a scowl was raised in their place. "What did you hear?"

"Everything," I replied. "Mother, is this why I have these strange thoughts, strange memories?"

Mother's face became neutral, but I could only imagine that she was thinking on how she wanted to approach this. "Yes," was her reply. "But, that is only temporary," mother insisted. "By the new moon's rise, they would have ceased entirely. You will be who you were meant to be."

I shook my head. "Who, a dragon without Breath, flight? I don't belong here, I'm useless." At least Hiccup had something. I might have been accepted as a Squire, but that was due to obvious parental favoritism. I remember something: the beating of a! hammer against a! iron. Herd, no, humans looked forward to him providing them with new weapons, new tools. He was good for something, I was not.

"Yes, you do! You will learn, child" mother said, "With proper guidance, proper training, you could easily become the greatest of our Kin in this generation." I thought of that for a moment, thinking about what it would be like to fly, to have flame coming out of my nostrils, to beâ€¦ strong. And well, maybe, that'd be good. Hiccupâ€¦ I was powerless, maybe I could be stronger than him.

"No," my brother said for me. "Your father, _our_ father misses you." I approached him, slowly. We were really brothers. I might have been imagining growing up alongside him, but that did not change the factâ€¦ He was my brother and Hiccup's friend. The image of that red furred man came up again, my father. Stoick the Vast was the name that came to my head. Maybeâ€¦ just maybeâ€¦ whatever it was that prevented me from remembering was coming undone.

I looked over to the Nadder's face, she stared deeply into my eyes. Maybe I was also imagining that she was a Nadder, she was human, thoroughly. Maybe I could remember her name, in time. "Hiccup, please, come home.."

The Changewing nodded, "Yeah, boys who actually use their heads are hard to come byâ€¦"

Mother stopped me, getting in between my brother and my friends. She had her teeth extended and bared. "No!" she snarled, furiously. "I forbid it. I will not allow you to go back to that life. You never fit in there." As if she would be an expert on that matter. I wonder, just how much time had she spent with Hiccup? She looked like she was ready to strike at a moment's notice and I recoiled backwards, afraid. There was no chance that I could take her on in a straight on fight. I stood my ground.

"I don't fit here either," I replied. "I might have been called the Useless, as a human, but at least I could do something to help around." Andâ€¦ I just wanted to find out the truth. Who was I, really?

"Kin have already pledged to serve you!" spoke out mother. "Would you leave them without a vassal? You have potential, all you must do is embrace it."

Toothless spoke. "Mother, would you like to come with us?" For a moment, I saw mother turn her attention to brother. Her body slumped down and for a moment, she almost seemedâ€¦ feeble, powerless, like something in those words had laid her low. "I'm sureâ€¦ dad misses youâ€¦ And well, I got turned human, maybe we can do the same for you..." "We could all beâ€¦ one family right?" For a moment, I tried to imagine what my brother was suggesting. Up until just now, he had been denying that we were brothers, and nowâ€¦ it sounded like he was open to the idea. I wonder if Hiccup would approve.

Mother was silent for a moment, a sort of weariness in her form. I can't really claim to know mother, but I couldn't help but feel, like she wanted to say 'yes'. "No..." said mother in a hushed tone as she approached my brother. "I can't let you do thatâ€¦ Child, my son, I have to stop you. Our Lord will help you forget about such foolishness. "

"What kind of mother does something like that to her child?" yelled my brother.

"Silence!" mother roared. "I am your mother and I do what it best for you!" She approached my friend, the threat to strike clear and present. The Nadder and the Changewing raised up their arms in defense, but they were unarmed. Not the best place to be in for a Herd warriorâ€¦. Well I am sure there might have been someone who probably could take on a Nightmare unarmed, but I don't know how he would fare against my mother.

My mother lashed out with her tail, attempting to strike the Nadder. The Nadder leapt back, dodging the strike. "Toothless, run!" she cried, prompting my brother to run for cover.

"Get of my way!" Mother lunged at the Nadder, only to barely escape the swing of a sword.

The Changewing, undetected had managed to reacquire her weaponâ€¦ and the Nadder's. She tossed an axe, at her double, swinging the balance of this conflict into their favor. "Well," said the Changewing. "Never thought I'd get to fight a Night Fury on the ground."

Mother snorted, unamused. Then she unfolded her wings and took flight, she clearly knew her best advantage was in the air. And that meantâ€¦ the Changewing and the Nadder were unable to fight backâ€¦ She launched one shot, clearly a warning, right by their feet. The duo turned tail and ran after their compatriot. I followed, too in a sprint. I had to make sure they were safe. They were my friends.

Mother launched another shot, and then another. All of them were purposely missed, all serving to make it clear just how much in control of the area she was. "Not fair!" yelled the Changewing, "Come down here and fight like girl, you lilly livered reptile!"

"Camicazi!" snapped the Nadder.

Infuriating my mother was the wrong thing to do. I only had to glance for a moment to notice she was correcting her aim.

I increased my pace and ran. I leapt into the air, my wings extended, but I knew that I couldn't fly. No, what I did was something else. I slammed into the two females, covering them beneath my large form. "Get down!" I screamed. They did not need brother to know what I wanted to say. Mother's Breath struck me. It hurt. It wasn't going to kill me, but it still hurt. Flame proof scales and my large body size proved to be adequate protection, the two females were unharmed, though I hoped I didn't suffocate them by accident.

I saw mother land beside me, an expression of confusion and bewilderment in her face. "Why?" she asked. That was the only thing she needed to say.

I gave a grunt and pushed my body off of the two small females; they dusted the sand off of their clothes. "Because, they are my friends." Mother seemed to give me a confused look. "I might be Kin, but that does not mean I'm their enemy." Mother was still confused. Maybe she just didn't understand, I mean, really, look at some of things she's done to me. "They are my friend's mother, they are people I _care_ about."

"No, it's not thatâ€¦" said mother. "It's just that, how do you remember them?"

"What?" Now it was my turn to not understand.

"Our Lord has said that you should not have been able to remember anyone else at all, even yet you do, why?"

If I had eyebrows, they would be raised. Was that a human thing? "I don't know," I said. I didn't really care either. All that matter was that no one I cared for would be dying, not, the Changewing, not the Nadder, not my brotherâ€¦ Wait, where was my brother?

"Mother!" I heard, my brother snarl. I turned to direction of his voice. I spotted him a fair distance away. a familiar Herd weapon in his hands, a crossbow if I recall correctly. "I'm ending this!" He pulled the trigger and launched an arrow.

"No!" I shouted. He was going to kill mother, our mother; he must have gone mad. I had to stop him. Without even thinking, I leapt into the arrow's flight path. It cut into my side, a place near to my belly. I fell to the sand, in a heap. The arrow stung a little, but I was still alive. Everyone was silent, stunned at what I had done. Brother did not even see it fit to launch a second bolt after my display. Well, I guess that was good, right? No one had to die or even get seriously hurt.

Thenâ€¦ my chest burned. I could look down and see an unnatural fire burn through my scales. The pain was so strong, I could do nothing only but scream in utter agony. It clearly was no ordinary arrow and it only took me a moment recall having seen this once before... On Outcast Island. Alvin suffered the loss of his hand when I jabbed an arrow. This time, I was struck squarely in the belly, probably hitting something important.

"Hiccup!" said my friends as they all ran to me.

"Child!" screamed mother.

The last thing I saw before my vision turned to darkness was that my friends and my family gathering around me. I guess it was only fair that Toothless shot me; I once did the same to him.

* * *

><p>I went over to Hiccup, dropping my crossbow, once I had realized what I had done. The arrow I had fired was of the last of the strange arrows that I had created, reworked to be compatible with my crossbow. When mother revealed to me myâ€¦ origins, I finally realized how they worked. In all of the times the arrows did anything, sorcery or an enchantment was involved. While I could not explain why the Nadder simply turned back to her true form whereas Alvin had lost an arm, I finally understood that the arrows did something to the magical energies of their target.

It was not that the arrows turned me into a human boy, they merely undid an effect that made me a dragon; I wasn't really a dragon. If my mother's story was true, then she was a human trapped in dragon form, then by extension, so was I.

This was the most shattering revelation of my life and no matter how much I wanted to deny it, it justâ€¦ made sense. All this time, I had been looking to return to my true form, I was in it the whole time. It wasâ€¦ easy for me to blend in amongst humans and oddly comfortable after spending a month in this body. Was the reason I was so interested in learning human things was because I was truly human? Maybe I already knew the whole time. Looking back, I realize thatâ€¦ I was very quick to forgive, even befriend the person who had taken everything away from me. Maybe he also knew, he had went so far as to teach me nearly everything I knew about human things and offer kindness to me when I was still indifferent to him.

It did not matter, right now. Brother or not, I still had to protect my friends, even if it meant fighting mother.

When Astrid and Camicazi were trying to escape my mother's Breath, I went to get my weapon, the first crossbow I have had to make by myself. I had to fight, she might have been my mom, but I had no choice. When I saw Hiccup, laying down on the ground at the mercy of my mother, I thought she was about to end Hiccup right then and there. I took aim and made a declaration, my first act of utter defiance against my own blood.

I was good at the crossbow, as accurate with that weapon as I ever was with my Breath. Even with the fact I made my weapon rather sloppily did not deter me. I just could not ever expect my friend, my brother, getting the way of my shot.

And unfortunately, he was in the same boat as Alvin was. "Hiccup!" I shouted as I went over to him. The arrow had already fallen apart, reduced to nothing more than a vapor, but the damage was done. He wasn't conscious anymore and the wound on his stomach looked bad, like it was decaying, rotting. The flesh of those who had taken the potion tended toâ€¦ decompose when they were struck by those arrows.

"What did you do!?" Astrid shouted at me, enraged.

She wasn't the only one. Mother ran over to me and slammed a paw, knocking me to the ground and pinning me in place. "What, indeed? Tell me my son, what you do done your own brother?" Her tone was stern, yet controlled, like she was trying to suppress her anger. For once, I think she was going easy on me; anyone else would have had his head ripped off by now.

Astrid, despite being upset at me, had her axe trained on my mother.

"It's like with Alvin!" I cried. "I thought to stop mother with those arrowsâ€¦"

Mother snarled. "You dare try to slay me?"

"No!" I pleaded. "The arrowsâ€¦ they're what made me â€¦ human," I said. "I thoughtâ€¦ it would be better that way."

Mother's anger flared for a moment, yet was held at bay by the threat of Astrid's axe. We were all at arm's length at each other. At this distance, Astrid could probably cripple my mother for life. Somehow,

I got the feeling that the only reason why she was protecting meâ€¦ was because she wanted a piece of me for herself. It was a scary thought to realize that both sides were likely going to tear me apart. I seriously hope that they do not decide to work together.

"Uh guys," yelled Camicazi, who was currently the only one staying near the downed dragon. "Hiccup looks badâ€¦ what're we going to do about him?" Funny how in this situation, she was being the voice of reason.

Mother released me from her grasp, backing away to our mutual cause. Astrid and I could only look as mother tried to stir him awake with a gentle tap of her snout. With each failed attempt, her motions became moreâ€¦ somber, more depressed. She desperately wanted him to awaken.

Then, I saw mother raise her head up and looked at me, a sorrowful look in her eyesâ€¦ her rage had been overtaken by her sorrow. Ifâ€¦ Hiccup and I really were brothers, then this was the proof. While, mother can be quite cruel and vicious at times, I at least knew that she, in her own way, cared for my well being, the same way she cared for Hiccup, probablyâ€¦ even more than she did for me. I just hope she can ever forgive me.

It was my fault. I did this.

Then, she raised her head to the sky and made a roar, one that can probably be heard for miles. Loosely translated, she said, "Come to my aid! My Flight come to me!" Astrid, Camicazi, and I had to cover our ears, because she was so loud.

"Gah!" groaned Astrid. "What did she say?"

"Oh, she called for helpâ€¦" I said as I tried to keep my calm. I only had a moment's notice to see that dragons, in every direction were flying toward us. They were above us for now, circling overhead. A few of them, likely Knights, swooped down, around us, encircling me, my friends, and my mother. All of them were poised to strike, each with teeth bared and fire ready to be released. We were Herd after all, we were to be killed on sight.

We didn't have time to run, nor would we. Hiccup was still hurt and none of us were leaving him behind.

"Joy, more dragons," said Astrid.

"Thank you for stating the obviousâ€¦" I muttered aloud.

"Well, never been to a dragon prison beforeâ€¦" said Camicazi, trying to sound optimisticâ€¦ I really hope her stealth skills were up to the task of freeing us.

My mother turned and addressed the assembled crowd of dragons. "My son," she said, soundingâ€¦ almost mechanical, her voice heavily controlled, "is hurt and needs assistance. Take us to our King." Well, if anyone knew how to best help Hiccup, it would have to be him. Mother looked at me, clearly weighing a decision before speaking, "Including these Herd. Take them with usâ€¦ _unharmless._" Well, at least she wasn't going to have me killed, yet.

A couple of dragons bowed their heads and focused their attention towards us. With a beat of their wings, they took off to the air. "Hey, what're they doing?" said Astrid.

"They're going to take us to our King," I said, noting that the dragons were not circling us. "

"Oooh, that sounds interesting, meeting dragon royalty and all that." said Camicazi. "So how're they going to take us..

"Just try not to move too much," I said, not answering the question, but in a way, providing enough to make it clear. I knew how they intended to carry us. Dragons had only three options when taking things from one place to the other, either they carry it on their backs, they carry it in their paws, or they carry it in their mouths. The second and third how most dragons hauled prey. The first was reserved usually for hatchlings, only when moving them before they were old enough to learn flying. Unfortunately, we were not hatchlings.

The dragons swooped in claws and paws extended and clamped on to our shoulders. I thought I was going to get skysickness from how fast it all happened. I was just glad none of them were going to taste meâ€¦ They carried us like we were any other prey us up to the mountain's top. I only had a moment to glance at a duo of Nightmares who were hauling Hiccup's body right behind us.

"Oooh, this isn't so bad," chirped Camicazi, enjoying the view. "I like flyingâ€¦"

"I guess," said Astrid. "Just, don't tell anyone about this. I don't want anyone to know I was carried around by a dragon."

I nodded, despite feeling a bit green. Funny, how the guy who used to be a great flier before was the one suffering from it the worstâ€¦ This body was just so frail.

The dragons carried us through the smoking mountain and deposited us on one of the platforms near the top. The dragons that had taken us then flew to a platform adjacent to ours, they were to be our watch. Hiccup and mother were being taken further down, towards the King, likely to get Hiccup. I feltâ€¦ disorientedâ€¦ looking down at the seemingly bottomless abyss under me. I shuddered at the thought of falling, that was never a good way to go.

"Soâ€¦ that was your mother?" asked Astrid.

I nodded. "And Hiccup'sâ€¦." That caused Astrid's jaw to drop. I wasn't surprised, neither she nor Camicazi understood a word mother had said and I had stopped translating for them right after mother had revealed my origins. They probably never really gave much attention to the fact mother was writing out the name of a very particular Viking, who was apparently missing for years and well, the fact that a dragon knew how to write Norse. But I guess they were more focused on fighting than anything else. Still, I had to explainâ€¦ more clearly. "According to mother, she used to be a human woman named Valhallaramaâ€¦ and Hiccup's mother."

"So, wait, are you and Hiccupâ€¦ brothers?" Astrid asked, confused

and befuddled. "I meanâ€¦ I was thinking it back when you were talking to her about your father and turning her human, but I thought I was just going crazy."

I nodded in reply, driving the realization into her skull. "Motherâ€¦ had our Lord do something to Hiccup's mind to make him think we were brothers and he was always a dragonâ€¦ He had this weird delusion that you two were dragonsâ€¦ Though the part about us being brothers turns out to be true."

"Soâ€¦ that explains why he thought I was a Nadder."

What was surprising was the fact that Camicazi seemed completely unphased. "Oh, that explains thingsâ€¦" As if what I said answered all of her questions. "You two practically act like brothers," she explained. "I shoulda known you two _were _brothersâ€¦"

I sighed. "Yeah." And I just probably killed my own brother, some brother am I.

"But, wait, if you two are brothersâ€¦.Do you realize what that means?" asked Astrid.

I shook my head. No, I did not, nor did I know what she was referring to. Was there something important that I just didn't see? Well, it didn't matter now.

Camicazi, pulled on my tunic to draw my attention. "Look there," she said. I turned towards the direction she pointed at, a nearby platform. Upon that rock, there were humans, most of them were adults, all of them were women. Camicazi's crew were close to us, signaling us with waves and shouts, before dragons came by and blocked out vision. Camicazi was obviously quite upset at this, though, mostly at her own crew. "Some Bog Burglars they are! My own crew got captured by dragons! The getaway barge should never get captured, that's just bad burglary."

Thisâ€¦ just brought up disturbing questions. How did the dragons know of where the Bog Burglars were? They were supposed to be masters of stealth and deception, yet, here they, captured like the rest of us. Even better, how did mother know where to come find us. Running into Hiccup was clearly a coincidence, but motherâ€¦ just seemed to know where we were. How could she have known that? Did someone tell her? If so, who then?

That also made it quite clear we were at the King's mercy, if he had any for a traitor like meâ€¦ I had tried to defy a Flight Commander, not only once, but twice. And I had brought my friend, my brother to the near brink of death. Banishment or execution were my best options. Now I knew what Hiccup felt like. I just wish I knew what was being said or even _see _what was going on down there. For a being that was just that large, it seemed quite strange that you could never hear him unless he wanted you to. At least there seemed to be enough ambient light coming from the entrance for those of us who lacked the ability to see in complete darkness.

"Soâ€¦ what do we do now?" asked Astrid, voicing the question in my head.

"Well, obviously we deal with this so called King of theirs,"

Camicazi stated. "Cause if we couldn't, we'd be dead by now."

"Unless he wants us to stand trial" I said glumly. I really, really hope it never came to that.

Then, our guards, who had stayed silent for most of time, stirred. They clasped us in their paws and claws again, bringing us to the lowest platforms, the ones reserved for the Knighthood.

Once we were again on the ground, I spotted my mother close by, with Hiccup lain on the ground right in front of her, his wound appearing to have been healed enough to keep him stable, for now. On the platform to my left, I could barely make out the image of the Flight Commander Terror, Trader Al, surrounded by his Knights and Squires, which was odd, considering mother did not have hers. Yet, despite the other Flight Commanders joining, my teacher, One Eye, was nowhere to be found. Trader Al's entire Flight looked quite cross at me. "How pleasurable it is for you to join us, _Toothless_," the Terror hissed, my name dripped out of his words like something repulsive. He was justifiably angry at me, I burned his ship. Mother gave him a momentary glare, but he did not seem to care.

"You can talk?" said Astrid. I blinked. The Terror spoke in perfect Dragonese, yet Astrid was suddenly able to understand it. Now that I thought about it, it seemed just as strange how we were able to listen into such a tiny creature from that far away.

"**That is my doing,**" said my King, as his massive jaws and multi eyed face lifted itself from beneath the fogbanks. Astrid, understandably froze at the sight of my Lord. I bowed, immediately, along with the rest of the Knights, Squires, and Flight Commanders present. I might have been human, but one still had to abide proper codes of conduct. My King spoke again, "**It would be unfair of you to present yourselves, even though you are Herd, if you could not understand a word that has been said. So for a time, all tongues, Kin and Herd, can be understood as one.**"

"Thank you, my Lord," I said. Well, I guess I won't be needing to translate again. Although, now I couldn't help but feel a bit disturbed. It was clear now that he had always known humans were more than just another animal, yet he never revealed this fact to us. Why?

"Ooh, we get to talk to dragons," said Camicazi. "I was kinda hoping you'd be speaking in Norse, but this works too. My name is Camicazi, what's your's?" That was a good question. In all of the winters I had been in his domain, I had never once heard of my Lord's name.

My King notable gave a contemptuous snort. "**Little creature, there is little reason for you to know such things. Though your kind address each other by names given at birth, we, Kin, are different. Names are a privilege, a power. I will not give you such power over me.**"

"Fine, so then what do we call you?" added Camicazi. She did not seem the least bit frightened by the fact that she was looking at a being that could see her as a mouse. I think Astrid and I were more focused on that than we should.

***"I am the Lord and Ruler of my domain."** said my Lord**. "Address me as King, or as Lord, or as merely Sir. So long as you respect my authority, that shall suffice."** Camicazi and Astrid gave a slight nod, confirming they were willing to accept it. My King continued, ***"It is clear to me why you are here. You have come to seek out Dead Wings's firstborn, but in so doing he had been injured. And now you are here to request for his mending. But, you have gone against my rule, that is what stops me from aiding him."** His massive jaws then turned towards the Terror and his Flight, a wordless gesture, conveying the tiny dragon had the right to speak. ***"Speak now of their crimes, Ruseclaw, so that they might know."**

"My King," said the Terror. Apparently his name was Ruseclaw; I suppose it was fitting. From what I had gathered over the past few days after I had driven him from Berk, it seemed that he spent quite a lot of time in Viking villages, often making trades. His name might have been a literal statement of his duty, to lie, to deceive humans. "This one," he pointed at me, "has broken his vows as a Squire and has threatened the lives of another Flight, even having his fellow Squire's captured and held at the mercy of the Herd. Moreover, he has brought two Herd in your domain to kidnap his own family."

"And you took Hiccup from his home!" Astrid spat. "You lied to us for years and then tried to murder me."

"Only because you were a threat to our mission!" yelled the tiny dragon.

***"Yes, she speaks truthfully, she understands,"** agreed the King**. "Know Ruseclaw that though they are Herd, you were still bound to the code of conduct of Host and Guest. You, so long as you were in their lands, were bound to aid them, not to harm. The young Night Fury's response in that situation was the appropriate one; his decisions, tonight, however, are not as responsible."**

I blinked. The King did not consider me a traitor for trying saving Astrid when I was ordered to slay her? And instead stated that the Flight Commander who gave me the order was in the wrong. Everyone else except my mother seemed surprised by his judgment. "My Lord?" questioned the Terror, voicing everyone's concern for them.

***"One time, I knew of a ruler, a king. He had taken in a guest that had a disagreement with his brother. So he killed his own brother and was applauded for his Hospitality by his guest. This is the standard I hold you toward; Upholding the Code Hospitality is the greatest virtue one can attain."** I listened to the words my King spoke, the words of his story felt like there was a sort of weight to them. My Lord wanted me to listen to this.** "Understand, my faithful servant, your only tasks were to scout the area and recover our missing Squire if possible. The Night Fury should be applauded for his defiance of you, in defense of his hosts."**

"My Lord, I only did what I felt was best," muttered the terror, ashamed. It was not hard for me to see his fear. I mean, our Lord is considering him the one who acted poorly. "He was one of us, I had seen it fit to liberate him!"

***"Ruseclaw, this is not your trail and there are far more pressing matters to attend to." **And as if on cue, Hiccup made a loud moan in pain, reminding us of why we were here.** "I shall deal with your

errors another time. Your intentions were certainly for the best, but your judgment on how to accomplish them is hindered by your..."**

"My Lord," I interrupted him when Hiccup gave another groan. Maybe whatever my King "I do not mean to disrespect you, but my friend, my brother, is hurt and maybe getting worse." The fact that my Lord hadn't swallowed me whole right now was probably a sign that I was in his favor. "I wish to know what stops you from healing him, I beg of you!" I had my head bowed and my body kneeling on the floor. I was desperate.

My Lord's eyes all focused on my me and friends. There was a weight, a pressure forming in my skull as I felt a familiar sensation. My King was looking into my memories, looking into my experiences. I did not resist, I did not hold back. I couldn't anyways, I gave him the right to look in when I swore to be a Squire and I needed him. There was just not telling what he would see, what he would think**. "So, unfortunate, always torn between two worlds" he lamented. **"Though your actions against Ruseclaw, were justified, and indeed, the proper response in those events, your actions and intentions tonight were treasonous. In order for me to aid your brother, something must be given up to make up for your crimes."**

"What then?" I said to my Lord. "Tell me." I suddenly felt the pressure of my King's will, I suppose focus onto my back, specifically, around the area on my bag. And I knew what he wanted. He knew about the potion, I let him see my memories unhindered. I instinctively drew out a rune inscribe kettle from my pack, the ingredients to the potion were already inside and loaded.

Astrid and Camicazi looked surprised; I didn't tell them what I had.

"Power on the level you seek requires sacrifice. Though I have the power to do so on my own, a fair price must be given in order for you to receive this service." **my Lord stated. **"At the same time, I desire justice for your transgressions. The best solution then is to combine both into a single action."

"So, you want Toothless to return to being a Night Fury?" Camicazi asked. I thought of that returning to that form, even if it wasn't my _true _shape, would have been great. I could finally stop fearing the dark and regain the power I had lost though, I think I was going to miss eating stripped eels. And hey, if it made sure Hiccup survived, then I'd be happy with it. I could show him how to fly.

"No," **said my King, dashing my original hopes. **"I do not intend for him to return to our Kin quite yet. Also, he sought to regain that form, it would not be much of sacrifice."

"Ooh, then what about me?" said Camicazi, excitement beaming from her face

"No," I supplied for my Lord. "You wanted to be a dragon ever since Hiccup started growing scales. If my wanting to return to my Night Fury form means that I don't count as a sacrifice, then you don't be either." Which left only one person to drink the potion.

I turned to Astrid to see that her eyes hardened with resolve. She stepped forward, having made her decision. It was clear enough to my eyes. "If I take the potion, will you heal Hiccup's wound?"

***"Yes, child," **said my Lord. Child, not Herd. ***"Dead Wing's first born will have his flesh be made anew. It will be as though he was never harmed."**

Astrid though did not seem content with just that. She bargained with the King a little more. I guess she did not feel healing a nasty stomach wound was equal to the price of slowly turning into a dragon "And will you notâ€| mess with his head again?"

***"That is unnecessary, Dead Wing's first born is too resistant to my methods for a second attempt. My alteration of his memory was already being overcome before you had set foot in my domain. Even against a resistant mind, my spell's hold over one would strengthen over time, further rooting itself in; but with this child, he was growing more aware and resistant to my tampering with each day. Even if you had not intervened, it would have failed before the New Moon arrived." **I took note of that, even though it seemed strange he was telling us all this. Hiccup was able to _overcome_ my Lord's power. _Never_ have I ever heard of such a thing like that happening before. The question then wasâ€| why, why was Hiccup so resistant.

Astrid seemed content with that reply, but she still was not content with what the King had already agreed to. "Thenâ€| if I take the potion, will you allow us, all us, including, Toothless, Hiccup, and Camicazi's crew to go home? And I mean Berk, not here." Mother, visibly seemed saddened by the girl's bargainsâ€| Even if Hiccup was being healed, she was still going to lose him. The only one who could allow him to be healed was also going to make sure he was not going to stay on the island. I never could claim to fully understand mother, but it was clear she did miss my brother for many, many winters.

My Lordâ€| did not roast Astrid alive for impudence. Instead, he performed something that could only be described as a grin on his utterly massive jaw line. My Lord was amused by Astrid's requests for more. I could only just stare at the whole scene unfold as my jaw dropped. ***"Now why does a mere child like you demand such things? If I recall correctly, you are the one seeking my aid."**

"Because all of this is going to help him_, Si_r," she added that last word with extra emphasis. "I think Hiccup should go home, as intact as we could get him."

***"To a home that does not respect him, to a place that he risks his life."**

"_I_ respect him," Astrid practically screamed, making sure everyone on the low platforms heard her. If anyone was not paying attention to her before, they definitely were going to now. "And he's in just as much danger here as much as he is there." My King visibly grew less amused with her accusation, but did nothing other than listen intently. "Hiccup had been kidnapped," the shield maiden in training pointed to the Terror formerly known as Trader Al. "This dragon here had him taken away against his will and instead of returning him to his friends and family, you had him held hostage and had messed with his head!"

My Lord had turned his attention to mother, whose face was obscured beneath her wingsâ€¦ was she sad? Grieving? Guilt ridden? **"While the initial capture, was as you described, unlawful, his mother requested that he remain here and have his memories altered, that is a perfectly legitimate for reason for our actions since then. And he was not held hostage, but instead he would have been exalted to highest station in time." **My Lord's response was flatter, more controlled than what I had heard before; he was quickly losing his patience and doing his best to maintain it. **"Moreover, you were the ones who injured him**."

"Which would not have happened if you simply returned him," Astrid insisted. "Mother or not, you still held him here against his will."

**"Children do not always know what is best for themselves." **Now my Lord's tone began to sound more irritated and upset. I really hope Astrid would not force my King too far. It would not end well for anyoneâ€¦ in a five mile radius, again. We don't talk about the Gronckles who only delivered one fish to our Lord.

Before the situation could get any more volatile, mother of all dragons, intervened. "My Lordâ€¦ perhaps this female is right. My son," For a split moment, she turned and looked at me, an emotion, a feeling I could not identify was in her eyes. It was gone and her face returned to looking at our King before I could understand what I saw. "My sons," she corrected, "should be free to go wherever they wish." Okay, so I think I found the one thing that can top the revelation that Hiccup and I shared the same mother and fatherâ€¦ Mother was helping me out of what could only be the kindness at the bottom of her heartâ€¦ Because any other reason would make no senseâ€¦

My King calmed down with my mother's words, just in time for Astrid not to become a smear on the ground. **"I suppose the parent consents to such a matter, there is little that I could do to stop it. Very well, child, your request is shall be granted to you. I shall heal Dead Wing's first born and allow him and as well as any others to leave this. In exchange, you will imbibe a potion and become Kin. Do you accept this?"**

"I accept," said Astrid. "I will drink the potion."

**"Then, call me once you uphold your end of our bargain. Ruseclaw, provide them with what they need to ensure that they do so."
**

"Thank you_, Sir,"_ Astrid said, clearly trying to feign gratefulness. Everyone proper picked up on that, but the fact of the matter was that she tried to sound grateful, which was close enough to the real thing to qualify. And then, my Lord's head retracted into the clouds, disappearing behind the floors of red mist.

Mother followed suit, flying away and out of the cavern. Where she went, I did not know. I wish I could speak with her, beg for her forgiveness. She might have been overly aggressive, but the fact of the matter was that she was still my mother. I also wanted to knowâ€¦ why she decided to let us go. I mean, did she have something planned for us?

The Terror and his flight disappeared, as soon after her. Well, most of them anyways. As soon as that Flight was gone, several Terrors came by to give us some wood and water to preform the construction process. That and to oversee us. I figure it was Trader Al's doing. He, for some reason, knew about the potion, I could only guess as to why though.

Camicazi approached Astrid a grin on her face. "You did it, Astrid!" applauded the Bog Burglar. "You did it! You not only managed to get Hiccup, but you also got us our way home!"

Astrid returned that with a smile of her own. She won and she knew it. Sure, a dragon helped her, but that did not change the fact that she bested the largest dragon, in probably all recorded Viking history, with _words._ "Yeah, I did. Though can we trust him to uphold the end of the bargain?" The girl gave me a slight glare. She was still upset about the fact that this was all my fault, but that anger had mostly subsided.

"We can trust my Lord," I stated. "He honors his agreements." As far as I knew, at least.

"Excellent. This night is only getting better and better. Isn't this exciting, Astrid?" yelled Camicazi. "You get to be a dragon!" That earned her a harsh look from the shield maiden. She liked the fact she 'won' against my Lord, she was less than thrilled about what it cost her.

Wanting to stop my brother's pain, I picked up some wood and laid it on the ground. I asked the Terrors, who were surprisingly unphased that a Herd was speaking to them, to give me a fire. I suppose whatever my Lord did to allow us to speak over the language barrier was still in effect. And I began to work as my thoughts drifted to my mother. Where was she going?

* * *

><p>I flew from my Lord and my children, feeling for the first time, in a long time, the taste of defeat. It was not that I lost a fight, not that I been beaten in pitched battle. No, that would be the greatest thing I could endure, being felled by a worthy enemy. Losing great battle was never defeat.<p>

No, I was defeated not by blade or tooth, but by my son's words, constantly repeating themselves in my mind. My youngest's voice, his human voice, constantly asked me the same question, over and over again. What kind of mother would do the things I did to my children?

All I had wanted them to do was to make them strong, raise them to be good, mature adults. When he was but a mere hatchling, I had coddled my youngest, the same as any good parent should, but slowly weaned him from such coddling. He was my son, and though I cared for him, it was simply not _right_ for me lavishly drown him in affection. He should be strong, should be bold; I did not go easy on him.

Just as I would have with Hiccup, had I spent more time with him. I could only hope his father hadn't gone too easy on him.

When my son was first delivered to me, in the paws of a returning Nightmare, thought lost to us, I think something in meâ€| awakened. Here was my son, my eldest, brought to me after over a decade and half way into becoming a dragon, a Night Fury, like me and my son. It was as though I was being given a second chance by the godsâ€| I had not been praying much since Iâ€| changed.

I asked the King to look into his mind, to show me some snippets of what I had missed. I had the right to do that and he was badly hurt. I figured that learning how it came to this, from his eyes, would tell me what I needed to know. I wasâ€| disgusted by the things in his memories. He was a weakling of a boy, who sometimes wished he was someone else. He lacked the power to be anything, other than a scrawny boyâ€| And, on more than one occasion, he had tried to slay me, her own mother, just to win a little glory.

And so I thought about what to do with him. When I became a Night Fury, I was unable to connect to my old life, my former friends, my family, seeing just another trophy on their walls. I had to cut ties with them and partake under the King's service in order to support a child I knew nothing about. I wasâ€| weak in those first few days, keeping the egg close to my body, for that had all that remained of my youngest. He was one of the few things I had left to call my own.

When I encountered the King, barely a week into my suffering, I choose what was the best action at the time. And I had few regrets of my choice. I learned about their culture and history. I had always thought there was more to dragons than what our little class lessons and Bork the Bold's books had shown us, and I was seeing it, right before my eyes. It was easy, listening to bards as they sang hymns of long dead warriors, watching hunters offer the choicest parts of felled prey to the King. It was beautiful.

And in this culture, in this society, I decided my role in it. I ensured that it would remain strong. The King had told me many times that the world we lived in did not tolerate weakness. I would make sure that everyone lived up to that standard. Even my own Kin. I wanted us to be the greatest amongst Kin.

But while I spent the better part of my time as a Night Fury, raising my youngest, my eldest was not living an ideal life. He did not fit in as a Viking. I wanted to fix that, to make him stronger, more powerful, to be accepted. So I made my decision. I had the King slowly change his memories, remake them as though he was raised amongst us. He would have beenâ€| complete. It would have been better than being a scrawny boy so easily compared to a toothpick.

But nothing I had done worked as I thought it would. He had been questioning things, confused in the past few days, the spell my Lord wove on him was weakening. And that was before my youngest arrived, in human form. I wasâ€| worried about him, once I heard he had not returned with One Eye's Flight and the old Gronckle's tale made me wonder what happened to him. I was almost ready to accept him back under my wings, if it were not for the fact he would be taking his brother away from meâ€| And that all ended with my son incapacitated, sustained only by the power of my Lord.

And I did my doing. If I was a little lessâ€|selfish and had just sent him back home, to him, maybe he would not be dying. There

would never have been a point for my children to have fought as they did, in the first place. I was fortunate that my Lord would be healing him. Now though, there was something I had to do. I had to make up for what I had done to them, especiallyâ€¦ to _him_, _my_ former mate. I hadâ€¦ done wrong to my, no, _our_ children. They should not be near me.

I flew to my den, the cave I had been keeping my child as he was recovering. I moved near the rock where I made my bed and dug a small hole into the ground by it. While it was true my youngest one was one of the few things I had of my old life, there was one other thing I still possessed. I took that item and made my way back to my Lord. He would understand what I was about to do.

The earliest rays of dawn shined over the horizon when I had entered back down the mountain, bringing a little warmth to my heart.

By the time I had arrived on the platform my Flight would normally have been on, there was a discarded andâ€¦ melted cooking pot on the stone floor. My youngest and the two girls that were with him were gathered by the eldest. "It's done!" yelled the girl. "I drank it!" I had seen plenty of images of her in my eldest's memories, but I did not understand why.

Then, then there was a rumble, as my King's massive snout pushed itself above the fog clouds. **"I see that it has been done as required. Very well, now I shall fullfill my end of the bargain." **Our Lord fixated his eyes, all six of them upon my wounded son. He was more powerful than any sorcerer I heard about, save Odin. He did not need spells or incantations, so much as he needed only some to enforce his will upon a task. There were no fancy lights shining upon my child, no clouds engulfing him. No, my son was healed, before my eyes. Flesh that had been decaying and rotted off did not seem to mend itself, rather, it was as though the very injury itself never happened.

"Hiccup?" my youngest said questioningly, hoping to see if our Lord's power had done its task. Of course, it did.

My eldest son's eyes flickered dimly. He was still weak, but he could recover now. He looked into his brother's eyes, for a moment and spoke only a single phrase, "Toothless," before laying down again. I blinked. The way he said itâ€¦ it sounded like a name, not a mere collection of words. My youngest had a name nowâ€¦ I never named him, because it just would not have fit in, amongst our Kin, yet somehow, some when, he had received a name. Who would come up with a silly name like 'Toothless'?

My King spoke again when my eldest fainted. **"As was agreed, you, Herd, shall be allowed to leave my domain. Dead Wings's and Ruseclaw's Flights will oversee that this is done." **

My son approached me, sorrow in his eyes. "I'mâ€¦ sorry, mother. I'm sorry for what I did to brotherâ€¦"

I kept my face neutral, trying to suppress my emotions. One must never be weak. "I have a task for you," I stated, not responding to his previous statement. I put my only possession into his hands.

My son spent a moment, looking at my treasure, a small ruby tied to a

necklace. "What is it?"

The ruby used to be part of a heart, hopefully, my mate remembers it. "Give this you your fatherâ€¦ and tell him I live."

"Why?" the girl who had drank the potion asked. She had not changed, much physically. One of her eyes had changed color slightly though. I was curious as to why.

I growled a little, but she did not flinch. "This does not concern you, child. All my sons need to do is give their father and tell them I live."

"Astrid's rightâ€¦ why should I do this?" questioned my son. Since when was he soâ€¦ resistant towards me?

I sighed, admitting my reason. "Becauseâ€¦ I am sorry for what I have doneâ€¦" My son's face contorted into an expression of disbelief, it seemed he was having a hard time believing anything I said tonight. "I was a fool, child, it is time I stopped acting like one. All I ask is that you tell your father the truth of this night, about me, about you." My soon said nothing, only taking necklace and putting it on his neck. "And lastly, I request one last thing from you and your brother"

"What's that?" said my youngest son.

"Survive at any cost." Before my son or his friends could reply, Kin, mostly Nightmares and Nadders hoisted them into the air, cutting short what may be my only moments with my children for a long while.

Flight Commander Ruseclaw approached me as soon as his Knights flew away. His flight was the smallest, but ultimately the one suited to dealing with humans, for a time, they would use trickery to blend within the human world. When I had first come to the King, I had tried to use his techniques to take back my old life. Although, I quickly learned they would not workâ€¦ I was stuck in this form, so I learned to make myself comfortable in it. "I still think letting them go without making sure they do not speak of how to get here is a bad ideaâ€¦" muttered the tiny Kin.

***"It is my descision,"**said my Lord. ***"The Night Furies are Kin, trustworthy, in my eyes. They will not seek us harm."**

"Are you so sure about this?" questioned that little dragon. "They are Herd."

I growled him. "Do not doubt my children," I snapped. No one spoke ill of them. "I am Herd, do you mean to doubt me as well?"

The Terror did not so much as bat an eye. While he was much smaller than me, I had no doubt he could hold his own against meâ€¦ for a time. If we ever fought, he would easy prey after a minute or so. He had an arsenal of spells and enchantments, at his disposal, most of them deceptive magics or of little effect against me; we're fireproof after all. He likely kept some of his greatest powers secret, but I was not being foolish in challenging him. "I simply concerned for our Lord's wellbeing, should the Herd use them to find us, it could spell the end."

"No," **disagreed our Lord. **"It would merely be the beginning."

* * *

><p>A thorough memory alteration is a slow and time consuming process. The King and those involved are not simply blanking Hiccup's mind and making a simple story to justify why he remembers so little, instead. This is a full memory conversion. Hiccup is slowly having his memories altered to fit in with the role his mother wants for her son. It's a complete memory set. As a result, memory conflicts are extremely common. It's these holes that Hiccup is trying to force open. The King might be incredibly powerful, butâ€ he's far from perfect.

Note that theâ€ weird narration from Hiccup's Point of View is due to the unstable nature of the mental effect. It was confusing to write. He not only refers to himself in the third person, but also in the first person. This is the result of the weird mental warping he had undergone and really this is the only way to portray it at these early stages of a full memory rewrite. You see yourself as the old you and the new you at the same time, but at the same time not.

Alsoâ€ I had Val do a little something familiar to readers of the book will know about. She and Stoick have the same response to having their authority challenged by their kids. It should be a bit clearâ€ she's on an emotional rollercoaster.

As for the Kingâ€ his morality should be quite clear after reading or even more confusing. I mean, he doesn't consider Toothless a traitor, yet he considers his own Flight Commander oneâ€ Some of you familiar with old stories might be familiar with his referencing.

I will be honestâ€ that last chapter with Valâ€ was a little heart wrenching. Just be aware that though I had the King and Val look into Hiccup's mind, they don't know everything about him. There is a practical limit to looking through memories, even if you have a whole day to look through the mind.

18. Chapter 18

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

This chapter was easier to make than the other ones. Managed to get this done quite quicklyâ€ at least once I started writing. I'm going to try to get another up by the February the 28th, but no promises.

I'm sorry for giving everyone nonstop heart attacks from all of the crazy plot twists, but I promise you, this chapter is not as insane as the others. This is mostly to take a break to get things back in order.

Remember to read and review. There's detailed notes explaining
some things** that happen in the chapter on the bottom, as

always.**

* * *

><p>My feet feltâ€¦ weird. I could feelâ€¦ something wet and slimy moving back and forth from my toes. It only took me a second to realize that I had been asleep, before â€¦ whatever it was coaxed me awake. My eyes were shut tight, the fading weariness of my sleep still holding them. What was not drowned by sleep was my brain; I was awake enough to think of what was going on. My current and only guess was frightening; It could have been a snake, slithering through my toes while I was asleep.<p>

Now, I wasn't terrified of _all_ snakes or anything, I knew most snakes are completely harmless to us humans, butâ€¦ there was the off chance that what I was dealing with was _not_ so harmless. Poison could fell even the mightiest man, if enough of it was used. I might have been big for my age, but I was not _that_ big compared to a full grown man. I would call myself a cowardâ€¦ if I did not already know that was true. So I did what any good coward like me did and just waited for it to go away.

I waited, and waited, and waited, but still, that snake was not leaving my feet aloneâ€¦ Gods help me, I was so scared for my life. I made small prayers here and there, hoping the gods would give me some reprieveâ€¦ or at least mercy after I died. I could pull my leg away, but then, the snake would bite me in reflex. It did not seem like that that snake was not going away any time soon.. That meantâ€¦ I could not be a cowardâ€¦ I hated it. Why couldn't someone else be the hero?

I took one moment and a deep breath more, andâ€¦ slowly opened my eyes, the light shining in my eyes. Slowly, I turned my neck towards the direction of my feet, going to look my cause of death in the eyeâ€¦ except I realized I just might not be dying after all.

Instead of a voracious serpent with poison dripping out of its fangs, there was a very familiar, big sized girl licking away at my feet, rather happily. "Meatlug?"

She stopped licking and giving me a smile. "Oh, finally, you're awake!"

"Youâ€¦ were licking my toes?" Suddenly, I felt very stupid for thinking I was being attacked by a snake. I should have remembered that I had a guest overâ€¦ one with very odd mannerism no human would ever have. With Astrid and Toothless gone, someone had to look after one of the few dragons on Berk that looked human. Granted, I had some really weird looks from my parents when I brought her over.

"Of course," she said. "Why shouldn't I?" Most other girls I knew, well, of the three who knew my name, would probably say licking somebody else's toes was gross; even I think it might have been a littleâ€¦ weird. On the other hand, none of us were dragons who wore enchanted necklaces.

"Why?" was my only response.

"Well, how else was I supposed to wake you up?"

I got out of bed, feeling rather unsettled by how wet my feet were against the wooden floor. Sure, there were loads of other ways to wake a sleeping Viking, but I don't think any of them involved licking someone else's feet. I wiped dry them with a wash cloth. It was made even worse by the fact Meatlug was a girl. I really hope my parents don't find out. That would have gotten real awkward. "By tapping me on the shoulder?" I said, I mean that was one of the more direct approaches and was far less likely to be interpreted the wrong way.

Meatlug stayed silent for a moment, her only response was an awkward blush. "But Fishlegs, that would be odd."

"Odd?" Was there something wrong about tapping someone on the shoulders? Did that have to do with the situation I was in? Or was there something I was just missing?

"Yeah," replied Meatlug. "It is, it means something important."

That could be bad. She was not telling me something. It must have been one of those cultural things, like a taboo or something. I mean, I heard of some of the oddities of Roman culture, like supposed that they had a god in every household; I could only imagine the kinds of odd things a dragon might consider normal. I guess it was a little too much to expect other people to have anything normal like have a goddess of skis, well technically Skaldi also covered hunting and mountain stuff in general, but most everyone I knew remembers her for the skis. "With your hands?"

Meatlug blushed again. "Well, I was thinking with my tongue."

"With your tongue?" my question escaped my lips when I realized the answer. "Oh, right." Dragons used their mouths for everything. Back when we were trying to get Toothless used to his new body, he still kept on trying to use his mouth to pick up things. I was glad he never did any of that while working at the forge. Though, that still did not explain why Meatlug was so skittish. "Is there something I don't understand about licking?"

"No, not really," she said. "It's just that, well, licking in general is an affectionate gesture. When we are first hatched, our mothers lick us, not only to clean us, but to teach us of affection. It is one of the first things we learn and how we communicate our feelings to our parents before we can learn to speak."

"Wait, dragon hatchlings don't speak?"

"Not properly," said Meatlug. "It takes a few weeks or even moons before little Kin can even begin to learn our tongue, the rate at which they learn is dependent on the Breed." I nodded. I guess that meant, like human babies, baby dragons had to learn languages, though they apparently learned it faster. Given that I remember reading that dragons tended to grow into adolescence in about a year before their aging slowed down. Though, that made me wonder just how old Meatlug actually was. I mean for all I knew, she was only a year old, maybe less. Did dragons even use years?

"Go on." I grabbed a mug and filled it with water, taking a sip. I also grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and scribbled down a reminder for me to get a more in depth explanation another time. As much as I wanted to take advantage of an opportunity not even Bork the Bold had, I was far more interested in just listening to Meatlug talk. Besides it was time for breakfast. I found some oatmeal in a pot, still warm, still fresh. My parents probably cooked some and left a small portion when they went to work for the day. I poured two bowls of the stuff, for me and Meatlug, hopefully she likes it.

"Now, as I was saying before," she said, clearly trying to move back on topic. I took another sip. "Amongst my Kin, licking certain areas of the body has certain meaningsâ€¦ The feet are the most commonly licked places and it is expected for the guest to lick the feet of their host, indicating subservience."

I blinked, understanding. She was licking my feet because she was _expected_ to, waking me up was just a nice bonus. It was still gross, but at least I now understood something. Though that did not explain why she was so skittish about licking me on the shoulderâ€¦ even though that might have been just as weird, if not more. Normally, I would expect to be receiving licks by dogs or sheep, not by _girls_. "So, what does licking the shoulders means?" I said before taking a bite of my oatmeal.

Meatlug only stared at her bowl, hesitant. I wonder if this was her first time eating something other than meat. She lifted a wooden spoon, dripping heavily. "Well, you see, you have to understand," she stuttered, delaying her words, before shaking her head. "There's special meanings to licking the shoulders, the neck, and the face, all are dependent on the relationship with those involved. All of them are gestures of affection, but each has different context for what that affection actually means."

I blinked. That sounded complicated. I mean, it was bad enough just understanding that licking some body parts had special meanings, now she was telling me that there was a whole other layer to it. "Like what?"

"Like, uhâ€¦ remember what I said about hatchlings and parents, well, there's a familial affection," said Meatlug. Okay, so it seemed simple enough for now. "Then there's close friends and siblings. they would lick each other as a sign of deep trust and generally, it's seen as a closer bond than the parent-sibling one, since both parties chose to become so close, rather than one being born to the other." Still seemed fairly simple. "Andâ€¦ lastlyâ€¦" Meatlug blushed, stalling her explanation with silence.

"Meatlug?" I said, concerned.

"The last one involvesâ€¦" she seemed to have trouble saying it. "Lovers, mates," said the dragon in disguise. "There isâ€¦ very deep seated meanings involved when two Kin, one male, one female, lick one another in such a manner; it signifies a mating proposal."

I dropped my spoon, scattering the oatmeal on the floor. Now, I knew what Meatlug was being so shy about. Wow, that was deep. I mean, I liked Meatlug and all, but I don't think any of us were prepared for the dragon equivalent ofâ€¦ a marriage proposal, assuming dragon had the same ideas about marriage we did. And there was no telling how my

parents would see the whole thing, and that's without them learning who Meatlug actually was.

Shaking my head, I bent down to pick up my spoon, while Meatlug took tiny nibbles here and there. "I think I lost my appetite," I said, putting the spoon into the sink and readied to dump the contents of my bowl back into the cooking pot. No point in letting good oatmeal go to waste.

However, before I could dump my bowl's contents in the pot, Meatlug's hand gently grabbed hold of it. "Uh, may I have more oatmeal, please?"

"Uh, sure," I let go of the bowl, allowing her to add the bowl's contents to her's. It was at that point, I realized her mouth was covered in oatmeal.

"Thanks!" She dug into the mound, face first. She seemed to be enjoying it, though I really should be teaching her how to use a spoon. At least no one would think she was being odd—some Vikings never learn table manners at all.

Well, I guess this was one way to start off a day. Though, I couldn't help but feel like I was forgetting something, sometime important.

Before I could take my seat at the table, there was a knock at the door. I went over to it, twisting the knob to reveal the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, with a gleam of excitement in their eyes. "Uh, hello—" I said, trying to conceal my worry. This could be bad—Whenever the twins showed up, looking like that, something, anything was bound to happen.

"Hey, did you hear?" said Ruffnut, asking a familiar question with about fifty different answers. Every time they ask it, I always wonder if they set fire to something or if they stole someone's underwear, again.

"Those twin kidnappers are going to get the rods tonight!" said Tuffnut, excitedly, just like he was going to be hearing his favorite part in Beowulf which involves everyone's gut being spilled out. Yes, I was right; this was bad, really, really bad.

My jaw hung open for a brief second when I had just remembered what I had forgotten about. Not only was I supposed to protect Meatlug, I had to make sure the two boys who were really two halves of a Zippleback and the Nadder were unharmed. Toothless and Meatlug were counting on me for protecting their friends. While the Nadder was safe and not scheduled to be used in the Kill Ring any time soon, the Zippleback pair was going to be punished for helping take Hiccup away. Astrid and I had managed to stifle the townsfolk from outright killing them, by claiming that they were being forced to work against their will, but they were not innocent in the people's eyes.

I turned my attention to Meatlug, whose face remained mostly neutral, but a bit confused. "Rods?" She asked, clearly not understanding at all. This was a human thing, something we humans did to our captives.

I explained it for her. "Standard practice," I said. Standard, but

terrible. "Hot iron rods are going to be placed against their skin, either to force a confession or to interrogate them." I did not mention that after about a week, the burns would be examined. If there was scarring, they would be considered guilty, if there was none, then they were not. Still wasn't sure how it all worked out, but I guess it was fine.

"Oh, they should be fine thenâ€¦ Oh, wait. I forgot." said Meatlug, briefly forgetting that while transformed she was no longer fire proof and that the same applied to the Zippleback.

"Yeah, it hurts." Probably even more so for someone who never experienced being burned before. Dragons probably never had to deal with The Zippleback might even get crippled for life, depending on how bad the burns are. That made one thing certain, we had to save them, somehow before the interrogation starts. And that left usâ€¦ hours at most. Which meantâ€¦ I turned back to the twins. "Say, why are you two telling us this?"

"Uhâ€¦ I dunnoâ€¦" voiced Tuffnut, turning to his sister. "Hey, why are we here?"

"Don't look at me!" replied Ruffnut, defensively. "It was your idea!" That was the first sign that the inevitable was about to happen.

"No, it's not! You wanted to go and tell everyone!"

"No, I didn't you big liar!"

"Hey, youâ€¦" I tuned out the rest of the conversation because I knew what the results were. And thus began a shuffle on my front porch over an incredibly pointless question. Maybe I should have just kept my mouth shut and went straight to asking them what I needed them to do.

Eventually, the two twins managed to wrestle themselves off my front porchâ€¦ and into my house. Meatlug and I backed away from them as they went under the table. "Is thisâ€¦ normal?" questioned Meatlug, probably noticing how little I was making an effort to get involved. I only needed to nod once to make it clear. "And I thought Knights tended to fight over the stangest reasons.â€¦" I nodded again.

"You get used to itâ€¦" I muttered. I turned my attention the twins, afraid of getting sucked into their scuffle. "Uh, hey," I choked. "Mind if you guys do me something?" The pair momentarily broke their fighting to look at me. They were both interested, it seemed. "Can youâ€¦ help meâ€¦ break open the jail?" The two looked each other in the eyes, as if that was enough to know what the other was thinking. I think the scariest part of allâ€¦ was the big grins they gave me.

* * *

><p>I hated this. Astrid was missing, again. Earlier this morning, I went over to her house see how she was doing, like I have been ever since I heard of the fighting at a docks a while back. Instead, I found out that she was missing. I also wasted an hour trying to find that Toothless character, hoping he have answers for me, but like Astrid, he disappeared. Apparently the two of them a

note saying they were off trying to save my cousin, but it did not reveal much more than that.

Right now, I was just searching around my uncle's house, looking for any clues as to where those two had went. While I did not care much for Toothless, I was concerned about Astrid. This was the second time she had disappeared and again it was all Hiccup's fault. And just when I was starting to think my cousin was good for something after all.

I might have lost at the Choosing and might not have been selected for the Proving, but I was hoping I could take advantage of my cousin's sudden popularity. I mean, come on, I couldn't just stand around while my cousin suddenly became the most popular guy in town. There was a silent agreement we had, one which both of us had without even saying a word between us, he'd let me stand by him and take some credit so long as I was a little bit nicer with him. Of course, that was before he got himself captured.

I sighed. What else was new?

Hiccup was always on everyone's mind. Hiccup this, Hiccup that. Hiccup made me a new hammer, Hiccup destroyed my fence again, Hiccup is right behind me. All he had to do, was just show up for people to take notice of him. And sure, plenty of people were upset whenever he broke someone, but no one really disliked him. Everyone worried for his sake, and that's just because he was the son of the chief.

But me? I have to really work to get people to notice me. Me, Snotlout, the winner of every Thawfest game in my age bracket in the past nine years. Me, the guy who beat a bear's skull open armed with only my hands. And even when I got people's attention, I would be promptly forgotten about as soon as I leave. Or, at least, that's what I hope what happens. I could almost swear I overheard people call me Snoutfaced Snotlout. Some types of attention are not what I want.

I shook myself from my thoughts. I had no time for that sort of thinking. I was here to search for clues, clues to find Astrid. I searched the floor of my cousin's room. I found something strange. Underneath the writing desk, there was a book, hidden in such a way that made it impossible to see with just a mere glance. Shadows would cover it, either when the house was lit by candle light or by the light of the sun. No one would have know about it unless they, like me, were conducting a thorough search of the floor.

I took it, noting that it was covered in odd black scales. I flipped through pages at random, trying to make sense of what this tome was. I might not have been the most avid reader, but I know when I was clearly reading another language all together. There were some parts or words in Norse, but not enough for my liking. Whose idea was it to make a book like this? Normal books were bad enough, but one that required more than one language to read was just dumb.

Then, I found something interesting. There was a recipe for a strength potion or something, with clear directions for how to make them. This had to be the potion Toothless used on me. I mean, I certainly got much stronger, despite the side effects. Was this book the source of Hiccup's strange sorceries?

On the off chance it was, I decided to take the book with me on my way out. Uncle was no longer here, probably off moping somewhere, so he could not question me about it. As for Hiccup, well, he wasn't here to stop me, either. Besides, I just had to know what was going to happen to me. And maybe I can learn how to fix myself.

Running off, trying to think of a good place where I might read it and clear my head, I decided to go to a nearby beach. It wasn't far or anything, though I probably spent half an hour trying to get there. I found a rock by the beach to sit on. As far as I could tell, I was alone; no one else was around for miles. That gave me enough room to start reading. I don't have an obsession with reading like Fishlegs or my cousin did, but I enjoyed reading every now and again. Especially letters, specifically fan mail.

I opened the book, flipping through pages to find anything interesting. Most of it was useless junk, like how dragons were afraid of eels or something. There was also something about arrows, but men don't use arrows. It was probably worthless anyways. I flipped through the pages, finding nothing that interested me; it was all just gibberish or something unimportant. Maybe I should see if I can use that strength potion for anything.

However, something distracted me from reading any further. I heard a massive thud. Fearing for my life, I ducked for cover, laying flat on the sandy beach and placing the book over my head to provide me even more protection; I did not want anything else messing with my face or the rest of me for that matter.

When the noise settled down and I managed to steel my nerves, I drew a small dagger I had on my belt, hoping it would be enough to protect me. I mean, just because something made a very loud sound like that did not mean it had to be very big right?

Gulping my fears, I went to look for the source of the noise. No, I did not have fears. Vikings were fearless. And I was a Viking. I shouldn't have fears to gulp then why were my legs shaking? It was cold, right? We were already in the fall season by now right? No, I had to do this.

So, once again, I gulped by supposed to be nonexistent fears and looked for the source of the noise.

As I got closer to the source, I could hear something that was like heavy breathing, like whatever it was very exhausted and very tired. I followed the source of these sounds until I found a crater forming in the sand. And it was huge, whatever it was must have been a dragon of some sort. What else was big enough to make a crater I could probably build a house in? I gulped again. No, I was not afraid, I just wanted to swallow my own saliva.

There was a crater, but it was clear whatever made it was no longer here. But what I did find was a trail. It was not a series of footsteps or paw prints, but instead it was a smooth pathway like something was trying to push itself through the sand. It almost reminded me of how dried up streams were, except it was going uphill and into the land. Whatever it was, it either lacked legs or could not use them.

I followed the trail and the sound again, careful as I made my

approach. It was not long before I found my quarry. It was a Nightmare, one that reminded me of a Nightmare I had seen before, specifically one that had taken my cousin and made it so Astrid decided to go out and save him. But I really doubted it was the same beast. I mean, just because it was about the same size and the same coloration, did not mean it was the same creature. What were the odds of it being the exact same Nightmare?

Breaking from my thoughts, I examined the creature more closely, without it knowing my involvement. Whether or not it was the same Nightmare, I found myself feeling very fortunate at this find. The dragon was forced to pull itself forward using its wings, its legs being tied up in metal chains. It also clearly exhausted and potentially injured. There were some bloodstains upon its scales, but I could not tell the severity of the wounds or if the blood came from the dragon in the first from my current distance.

All in all, the Nightmare would not put up much of a fight, and that's if I did not just sneak up on it and slash off its throat. I was looking at a very valuable and easy to get trophy that I just managed to stumble upon. This must have been a sign from the gods, a chance to redeem myself. I guess it was fitting in a way I was part Nightmareâ€¦

I did not care how this creature came to me, all I know is that if I killed it and brought its heart to my father, I could finally get some of the respect I deserve. I might have slain a bear unarmed, but a Nightmare was a very prestigious kill. Someone else might have done all of the work, but there was nothing wrong with landing the finishing blow and taking the credit for myself. This was the chance of a lifetime, all I had to do was take it.

I crept closer to the Nightmare, my knife poised and ready to strike. It did not notice me; it was far too focused with trying to crawl into a cave off in the distance. I raised my knife, planning to make a decisive and final strike. I was behind its left wing right now, trying to keep a steady but silent pace near the creature; from here, I could make a leap and slash its throat. It was a very big target and even just a small cut could be very devastating.

That was all I had to doâ€¦ but why was I not doing it?

And then I realized I missed my chance at an easy trophy. The creature suddenly became aware of my presence and promptly reeled away from me, using its wing to spring itself away. The Nightmare curled itself up into a defensive stance, wings covering vitals, head and tail in my direction. Now, I could see there were minor cuts and what must have been bruises throughout its body, most likely the work of swords and bludgeons respectively.

The dragon readied to open its maw and release a gout of flame, but its aim was completely off, scorching an area that was probably fifteen feet away from me. The dragon was clearly unable to control its own flame, it must have been even weaker than I realized. It fired again and again, each time missing, even worse than the last. And then it was out of shots, exhausting its supply of fire it could throw at me, by making hilariously inaccurate attacks. The dragon and I both knew that it was completely defenseless against me. It might have tried to light its own skin on fire, but that would not save its life. Instead, it chose to run. I was enjoying this. I was facing

down a Nightmare and it was _scared of me_. This must have been how my uncle felt like when he was in battle.

The creature tried to scuttle away, using its wings to provide traction. I did not have to work very hard to keep up with it. It was slow enough already just trying to move forward, its sideways movement was even worse. And to make things even better, the dragon did not realize it backed itself into a wall until it was far too late. And now, it no longer had any room to move. It was trapped.

I raised my knife once more, readying myself for the strike. The beast knew it had no hope of escape, no hope of survival and just stood there, peering into my eyes. I looked back. It wasâ€¦ scared, fearful for its life. I approached the beast as it tried to bat me away with its tail.

Somethingâ€¦ just felt wrong about this. This creature, I had it cornered and at my mercy. But this was the way things should be, Vikings should have the power that even dragons would fear. But why did this all feel so wrong? Why did this all feel so familiar?

I remembered, just for a brief moment, about the one time I had my back against a wallâ€¦ and where my whole life changed completely. Suddenly, I was holding a battered shield and facing a Whispering Death's merciless assault. Then I was on the floor, bleeding as a spine pieced my gun, I feared death in the moments I laid dying, thinking that maybe I would be sent to Valhalla.

No! I freed myself from that memory. I was not that weak. I returned to my senses, looking at the Nightmare's closed eyes. They reminded me of... No, not again, not right now.

I raised my knife and went close to the dragon. Iâ€¦ could not kill it. It would just beâ€¦ wrong and it just remind me so much ofâ€¦ me. The scared dragon whined a little, wondering when death was coming. Iâ€¦ could just not let it stay here. I had to do something. I... lifted my dagger and struck. The metal chains broke as I shoved the dagger through one of the links. The chain became undone, and so did my weapon.

The dragon open its eyes, probably wonder why its legs were suddenly unbound. It gave me what I think must have been a confused look, wondering why I had spared its life. No, I wasn't sparing at all.. It's just becauseâ€¦ this wasn't a fair fight, right? I mean, come on, this was my big shot to get real famous. I mean, sure I could have taken advantage of such a weak dragon and claimed its life without a fight. But that's not how a _real_ Viking settles things. I deserved a fair fight. I grinned. Once it had regained its full strength, I would kill it, end of story.

The dragon approached me and looked at me, squarely at my faceâ€¦ It must have also been wondering why I was part Nightmare. Either that or it was thinking I was one of its kind. Then it did a few, unusual things. It bent its neck over in a manner that if I did not know any better I would think it was bowing. I mean come on, it's just an animal. Animals don't bow unless treats are involved.

Then the Nightmare extended its tongue and wiped it against my feet. I backed away after the first two licks. Gah, dumb animals. It was luck I was not running him through until it was well enough to fight.

The Nightmare backed away. At least it wasn't a complete idiot, it knew what I did not want it to near me. I just hope he did not think I was going to make it my pet or somethingâ€¦ Although, having a dragon for a pet would have been pretty awesomeâ€¦

* * *

><p>I knew I was desperate, but I did not see any other choice. If I had more time, I would have tried some other, less drastic methods. Instead, I was doing something that could be punishable by having a hand chopped off or worse. Because of the efforts Meatlug and I made yesterday, where we downplayed the involvement of the two boys and made it sound like they had no choice in the matter, most everyone were still trying to decide if they were guilty or not. Unfortunately, their trial was going to get them seriously hurt and had a good chance of getting them found guilty anyways.<p>

So to prevent that from happening, I had made plan to set the Zippleback boys free and away from the village and let them turn back into dragons. All we had to do was get them out and make sure no one knew of our involvement.

I took Meatlug and the twin to the Berk stockades. It was a small place which at most could hold maybe twenty room prisoners before needing to squeeze them tightly. Ever since the Battle of Outcast Island, most of those cells were taken up by Outcast warriors who we captured, during the cleanup of the island. Hopefully, the twins would be able to tell what our target wasâ€¦ I was really, really desperate.

"So, everyone remember the plan?" I whispered to the others just as we were just outside the jail building.

"Uhuh," said Tuffnut with a bored expression with his face. Earlier the two of them looked eager to open the jail, but it seems the idea had lost some of its appeal. Considering we had to walk for about an hour, I could not blame them. Boy, there had to be a faster way of moving around the island.

"So," Ruffnut muttered. "Remind us again why we're doing this?"

"Because it's going to be a rather nice prank," I said, trying to appeal to their common motivations. "It'll be fun."

"But that doesn't make sense. You don't _do _pranks." Tuffnut replied. "Does it have to do with _her_?"

"Yeah, wasn't she friends with those two?" said Ruffnut. Both of them were talking about Meatlug, who was trailing behind me. She stayed silent, probably not know what to say. For a moment there, I stood dumbfounded; Ruffnut and Tuffnut just usedâ€¦ logic of all things to try to figure me out. That was like something I would have in a nightmare. Then the duo gave off very devilish grins as an idea dawned upon them. "Oh, I get it!"

"Get what?"

"She's your girlfriend!"

"Wow, Fishlegs, you got a girlfriend before me!" said Tuffnut.

Meatlug and I exchanged glances of confusion.

"So, is this prank like an anniversary gift or something?" asked Ruffnut, never mind the fact that we barely knew each other for more than a week, let alone a year.

Not really knowing what else to say I decided to go along with it by saying: "Sure, yeah."

"Then that's settled, we'll help you make the best anniversary prank of all time!" said Tuffnut as he went into an alleyway between the jailhouse and a nearby store. Ruffnut went off, following him.

"What just happened?" asked Meatlug, not understanding the twins.

I did not blame her, I did not understand either. Just how did the twins make a leap from 'being friends with prisoners we have to break out' to 'girlfriend' to 'anniversary prank'? Besides, it just wasn't true. I liked Meatlug and all, but she just happened to be a friend who was a girl and a dragon. "Just smile and nod, just smile and nod," I said as I walked us into the building.

The main room was quite big, but rather plain. Only a few desks here and there, mostly there so the guards would not have to leave their posts when lunch time came. There were four guardsmen there, all decked out in full combat attire. Two of them stood by the entrance to the prisoner's ward, weapons drawn and ready. "Oi, Fishlegs," said one of the guardsmen. As someone who hung around Berk's most well known youths, everyone knew my name simply because of my associations. "And her," he said towards Meatlug.

"Hey, Nobber," I said. Nobber Nobrains was in charge of maintaining the prisons on Berk, both human and dragon. I hate myself for what I was about to do to him, but at least it would not hurt him or anything.

"I take it you're here to see those boys then?" said Nobber.

"No," I said. Technically, we were not, anyways.

"Oh, so what you here for then?"

"I want to know about this building, sir," said Meatlug, using an excuse we agreed upon.

"I'm showing her around town, Nobber. We decided we'd drop by," I lied. Well, again, technically it wasn't. Meatlug was surprisingly interested in human things. Maybe it was a dragon thing.

"Oh well, uh, sure," replied Nobber as he went on describing a variety of facts about the jail. It was just basic stuff such as the role of the guards to prevent escapes, the food the prisoners were eating, and how many times the prison was burned to the ground every time a Dragon Raid happened. Still, nothing really important or vital to know about, but definitely stuff that should be listed in a book. Some notable prisoners included Alvin long before he became an Outcast, Camicazi's mother back when she was a teenager, and Dagur at

one point. We never found out what happened to that cat.

While he spoke, the door to the prison bulged slightly as a hand reached for a set of keys attached to the belt one of the guards by the door. That was the twins, starting the first phase of the plan. I said nothing and tried my best to ignore it. The keys were taken without the guard even realizing what happened. So far, so good.

Then the hand disappeared, moving behind the door and gently closing it behind them. When the twins were given the promise of mayhem, they were surprisingly able to do things that one wouldn't think they would do. Now all I had to do was wait.

After that, it has been about ten, maybe fifteen minutes, of just listening to Nobber list random facts. Meatlug and I were making just making sure that the twins had enough time to get the Zippleback boys to safety. I had no idea how the twins managed to get in, but hopefully, they can use that trick to get out.

That was when I noticed something slam against the door, men, dressed in rags and armed with simple clubs came barging out of the prison doors. The Hooligan warriors by the door were caught completely off guard and were sent retreating. It did not take me long to realize that they were the Outcast prisoners, butâ€| how did they escape?

Ten men, armed with improvised clubs, charged out of the door before the guards could regroup and maintain the defenses. The Outcasts smashed their way through the lines, driving a wedge and taking half the room we were in the span of an eye blink. It all happened so fast.

And that was when I realized things were going to go bad. Before we even had the chance to get out of the way, a pair Outcast of warriors grabbed me and Meatlug by our arms and hauled us away. Sure, I might have been strong for a teenager, but I was not stronger than most men.

Their jailers tried to fight their way to save us, using sword and axe against wood, but it was not enough. The guards might have been armed better, but they were outnumbered and caught completely off guard. And now they had hostages. By the time Meatlug and I were firmly inside the prisoner's ward, I realized that they had the advantageâ€| and they were not afraid to use it. "Fall back and surround the building! We can't hold them here!" said one of the guardsmen as he left out the door, followed by the others.

The cages were organized into two rows, numbering five on each end. Meatlug and I were thrown into separate cells near the very back. The Outcasts cheered as they had realized just how much of an advantage they had. Great, just great. All of them headed straight for the main room, probably waiting for an opportunity to parley their way out. They were content to just have a bunch of kids stay behind them, likely convinced we were helpless.

I looked around, noticing who was with me. I shared my cell with Tuffnut and one of the Zippleback boys, Meatlug shared her cell with Ruffnut and â€| the other half of the Zippleback. Okay, so, wow. It'sâ€|more difficult trying to refer a Zippleback as two separate

beings I thought it was.

The twins gave me a wave as I looked at them. "What happened?"

"Well, we opened every cell, except the ones with these guys in them, just like you wantedâ€¦" said Tuffnut.

"We just think, if this is a prank, it's a very bad prankâ€¦" muttered Ruffnut. "I mean got locked up."

"And not in the good way!" Tuffnut added.

There was a 'good way' to get locked up in? I just slapped myself in the face; maybe getting the twins to help in a jailbreak might not have been the smartest idea.

"Gronckle?" said one of the Zippleback boys, confused at seeing their old friend.

"Why are you here?" said the other.

"To ensure you remain safe" replied Meatlug. "Andâ€¦ please, call me Meatlug."

The two eyed each other from their cages, an obvious thought came to their minds. "Meatlug? What kind of name is that?"

"Where did you even get it, especially sinceâ€¦ you knowâ€¦" he was refering to the fact that the Gronckle had betrayed them.

"I was under a lot pressure, okay?" I said. Really, why must everyone make fun of her name?

"Well, it's my name," replied Meatlug. "I'd prefer it if you used it."

"We guess it was rather nice of you to try and get us outâ€¦" Meatlug. The two boys just shrugged. It was strange really. They were surprisingly indifferent to the fact that Meatlug betrayed them.

"Butâ€¦ how do we get out from here? I am feeling ratherâ€¦ alone without my other half."

"Working on it," I said. "Say, how'd you guys even get in?" I asked the twins. They were apparently off doing a burping contest since they were bored of listening to us.

They broke for a moment, when Tuffnut realized I was talking to him. "Oh, we just took the top exit," Ruffnut said as he turned his head skyward. There was a small gap in the ceiling, far too small for any man to climb through, but for skinny teenagers like Ruffnut and Tuffnut, it would be easy. Meatlug and I did not have that option. So, using the twin's method of escape was a no-go. Maybe I could use the twins to give Chief Stoick a message and maybe get the Zippleback to safety.

Of course there was also the matter of getting out of our cages in the first place. I went over towards the cage door, grabbing hold of

the it. I rattled it for a moment, wishing it was unlocked. Even more than that, I wished the Outcasts were gone so I would not have to face them. And unceremoniously, I realized that the door was not even shut, let alone locked, when I rather easily when I gave it a slight push.

"What did I tell you?" yelled Tuffnut. "They didn't cage us properly!"

"That's like the best part!" added Ruffnut. Both of them were acting like they were victims of a horrible crime. At that moment, I did not care about why they were so interested in cages. All I cared about was the fact that my friends could now escapeâ€¦ but how? The Outcasts were all camping out at front. They were waiting patiently for something, likely for a way to get out of here.

"Okay, soâ€¦ now that we are no longer bound"

"How do we get out of here?" said the two parts of a Zipplebackâ€¦ I really wish they had names so I could stop thinking of them as one entity in two bodies. It was really confusing.

"Leave that to me," said Meatlug as she pushed open her cage door. She gave a glance at the twins, making it clear she had something to say to them. "Can you guys keep a secret?"

"That depends."

"Is it cool?"

Meatlug gave a glance at me. I shrugged in reply. "Well, I guess that's good enough," she said. She then began to undress herself, removing her clothing, including herâ€¦ undergarments. Out of embarrassment, I looked away and forced Tuffnut's head to turn away. I mean, just because dragons did not care much for clothing did not mean the same applied for me. What was she doing though? Why was she taking off herâ€¦ everything.

"Oh, that is cool," I heard Ruffnut say. I turned around to find a Gronckle in place of Meatlug. For the first time, I was seeing Meatlug as she actually was, a dragon, a Gronckle, not an abnormally large girl for her age. She was huge, but not big enough that she would have to worry about walking out of the door frame. I still failed to see what her idea was.

"Wow, I gotta learn how to do that!"

"Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"They areâ€¦ you know."

"You know who would be upset," said the Zippleback duo.

Meatlug gave them a couple of snorts and a growl, likely meaning something far more eloquent.

"Wellâ€¦ when you put it that wayâ€¦"

"I guess it's safe, for now."

The two boys also began undressing. I turned away again, only stopping when Ruffnut and Tuffnut commented about it there was a Zippleback out in the area. The dragon was so large, it barely fit in the hallway. Suddenly, I understood what Meatlug's plan wasâ€|

And the two, or maybe three, dragons charged out the door. Meatlug went ahead first and the Zippleback only really just poked its head out into the lobby entrance. I could hear screams of panic coming from the Outcasts as they were taken completely by surprise by the dragons.

While it was true that men could challenge and even kill multiple dragons throughout his life time, that only really applied when the man was armed and was trained enough to fight dragons. Only a few men like Chief Stoick were dangerous enough to not _need _weapons to kill a dragon. The Outcasts were not ready or able to fight off a coordinated assault by dragons, especially when they were caught completely off guard and armed with only wooden weapons. They also exerted themselves heavily in their initial push to freedom, weakening them further.

The battle was so incredibly one sided, I thought it was boringâ€| Except for Meatlug, even as a Gronckle, she was amazing.

The twins looked at me, probably curious. "Man, everyone's turning into dragons these daysâ€|" muttered Tuffnut.

"Maybe Astrid will be next?" replied Ruffnut.

* * *

><p>I awoken from my sleep, only to find myself on Camicazi's ship again. I could hear Toothless relaying directions and commands to the Bog Burglars, guiding them out from the fog. Why did I fall asleep, again? Last I remember, I was being carried by dragons as soon as I drank that potion as part of the deal.<p>

I pulled my body up, looking into the water to see my own reflection. I was still me, still human except for the slight the fact my eyes looked slightly brighter than before. I was fortunate enough that I had not grown any scales, everyone in the Hofferson clan would freak if they saw me returning covered with patches of scale. I took the potion, I was going to change, sooner or later. I would end up like Snotlout, or worse, Hiccup. Who knew how much time I had left before I would never see that face again? All because of one reason.

I looked at Hiccup, his large body taking up a solid fifth of Camicazi's top deck. There was no trace of the boy he had once been. If I were to look at him now, without knowing who he was, I would have thought him to be just another dragon. I had thought of also bartering for Toothless's King to return him to human form, but he had been getting more and more agitated by me when I started making more demands than just healing the Night Fury. I was lucky that I would manage to get him home. His father might not be as pleased thoughâ€| especially considering what happened to his wife. That man had been single for over a decadeâ€|

Toothless sat near his brother, not realizing I had awoken. It appeared we had just past the fog bank and no longer needed him to act as a guide not a moment ago.. Now, he was focused on the brother

he did not know he had. Today had been a traumatic experience for the two of them, so I've left him alone for now. Besides that, I was still upset at him; I would not have needed to make a deal with his King if it were not for him. nor would we have gotten to Hiccup. Maybe being a klutz was genetic?

Camicazi barked commands, getting the ship's bearings in order for the trip home. Her crew complied, but I had to wonder just what would they tell Chief Bertha. The girl approached me once that was taken care of. My lookalike's smile was still there, chipper as always, but it seemed more subdued than usual. "You're awake," she chirped, amusement in her tone. "So why'd you do it?" 'It' being deal with a dragon, the biggest dragon I ever heard of. Seriously, was Toothless's King one of Loki's kids?

"Because someone had to save him," I replied. I was not in the mood to discuss this, but I did not move. I was still tired and woozy. Best I could do was give her a generic response and hope she understood.

"Yeah, but why did you?" asked Camicazi again.

I just groaned, she was not going to make this easy on it. "It's dumb," I said. "Why I decided to do it's just dumb."

"Pft," Camicazi made an obviously fake scoff, her strangled laughter made it clear she was joking. "Dumb was me deciding to bathe myself in a barrel full of eels." I tried to suppress my own laughter, the memory of the day we had met was still fresh in my mind. She was grinning, knowing she had caught me. "Astrid, I just want to know Unless"

I did not like where she was going. "Unless?"

Her tone became hushed, silent to all but me. "Unless you want me to think you did it because he was your"

I did not let her finish. "No! He is not!" It was clear what she was going to say. That was simply unthinkable as unthinkable as everything we done in the past two months.

"So why?" Camicazi pressed again.

I sighed, deciding to just give up. Besides, at least I knew I could trust her. I checked around, making sure no one was eavesdropping. Not Toothless, not Camicazi's crew women, and certainly, not Hiccup himself. "Okay, fine," I said, much to Camicazi's amusement. "It's just that I think Hiccup was right about ending the war between humans and dragons." Camicazi hummed, waiting for a continuation. "Ever since I came to trust Toothless, to believe that dragons are more than just animals I've been think about us Vikings."

"Oh? Like how?"

"Remember our parents would always be telling us about the 'Bad Old Days'?" The 'Bad Old Days' was term we used to describe the age of our ancestors. It was an age full of bloodshed and adventure, of heroes and magic. Vikings pillaged and plundered around the clock, their entire life style revolved around fighting, how to get more

fighting, and how to fight better.

"Yeah, so what about them?"

"Our world was different from what it is nowâ€¦ so I got to thinking, what would our world be like in the future?" Compared to our ancestors, modern Vikings seemed tame. We spent more and more time on things like security and trading than we did fighting these days. Adventure still existed, but that was a niche that was slowly becoming less and less important in our culture. "Hiccup, as far as I can tell, has an idea for a future, I've started to think he might be right about it." As much as I did not want things to change, I've seen too much to think they would ever be the same. Might as well go all the way at this rate.

Camicazi whistle, "I bet that's been on your mind for a while. Makes me feel guilty for having my main reason for helping is because I look forward to the adventure."

I grinned back. I don't know why, but maybe just talking about it made it feel easier, more natural to do that. "Well, someone here has to have her priorities straight."

"Darn right," said Camicazi.

"Toothlessâ€¦" I heard a voice gasp. It was Hiccup! Camicazi and I turned towards the direction of the awakening dragon. It still seemed I was able to understand the dragon language, but only just barely. There were someâ€¦syllables here and there that I could not quite understand, but I was able to understand enough of it to guess what he was saying.

"I'm here, bud," replied his brother.

"Where go?" The translation was getting even more unstable, more fragmented. I got what he said, but it was becoming harder and harder to actually know what he was saying. The words had been rendered down into their most basic meaning.

"Home," I said approaching the dragon.

"Astridâ€¦" he struggled to speak my name. Well, at least I thought he did; technically, he said 'beautiful' or 'beloved', but I'm guessing dragons did not have a proper term for my name, so he used the next best thing, the meaning of my name. Still, that did not tell me if the King lived up to his end of our bargain. He could have just as easily be complimenting me.

"Do you remember me? Do you remember home?"

The dragon nodded and then proceeded to try and utter a series ofâ€¦ sounds that made no sense. The translation enchantment the King gave me might have ended. "No words for home but idea," Hiccup turned to Camicazi. "Need wood. Me do something." So maybe he was trying to say something particularly difficult or nonexistent in the dragon language..

Camicazi shrugged. "Uh, okay," she said. "Well, you could just use the ship if you need it."

"That rude."

Complying, Camicazi gave the dragon a wooden shield, one that had seen much use and probably was going to fall apart someday. "Just a little something I had."

"Thankâ€¦ Youâ€¦" Hiccup said, before using his claws to delicately carve runes into the shield. It was a time consuming process, but eventually the dragon was done. Together, each rune said 'BERK'. "We go home."

I grinned. Hiccup remembered the name of his home and he communicated that by writing, a human task. The King definitely lived up to his bargain. Now, I just hope my bargain was the right choice.

"Head hurt." said the dragon.

"You don't need to be sarcastic, bud," replied Toothless. Apparently Hiccup said something sarcastic, as usual, but it did not get picked up in the translation. "Get some rest."

"Noâ€¦" replied the dragon. "Have to see dadâ€¦ our dadâ€¦ Tell him about mom." I really wish I knew what he was saying beyond the most basic meaning. I mean, as amazing as it was to understand dragons, I wish it was more direct, smoother. So I could actually reply properly. Toothless must have had it easy. Hiccup could understand Norse and the dragon language, but not speak Norse. Same applied with Toothless, except he could not speak the dragon language. That was not an issue when they needed to speak with each other.

Toothless reached into his pack and pulled out the red gemstone his mother gave him. "Mother wants us to tell himâ€¦ don't know why. I just can't understand her sometimes, I mean she seemed to have anâ€¦ obsession with you."

Hiccup replied, "Dad like you even not brothers." Toothless seemed to get rather upset about that. I did not have to think hard to understand what Hiccup actually said.

"Oh yeah, you just had to step on the island for mother to start fawning over youâ€¦ I heard about some of the things she did from some Terrors while I was brewing the potion," said Toothless. "Mother hasn't acted that way to meâ€¦ in a very long time."

"Dad wish you son. Now you are." replied Hiccup, clearly a tone of what can only be sarcasm in his voice.

And thus began what must have been a verbal battle worthy of the twins. Maybe it would have felt less one sided if I could actually understand what one of the combatants were saying. Mid way through their debating and arguing, I stopped being able to understand Hiccup completely. The enchantment had finally ended and now all I could hear were animalistic grunts and snorts. Hiccup and Toothless were too wrapped up with each other to even notice.

"You knowâ€¦" Camicazi said to me. "When you think about it, they act so much like brothers, that the first thing they do when they learn about it, they get in a argumentâ€¦"

"Yup," I replied. "They act so much like brothers, I couldn't believe

we never realized it before nowâ€|"

* * *

><p>I stood, surveying the damage in the jail's lobby. Incapacitated Outcasts littered the floor, each had their hands bound by ropes, as they were hauled back to their cells. Burnt remains of tables were found scattered nearby; it was a miracle that the building did not get burned down in the battle that only happened a moment before. I looked at the ones who were apparently responsible, six youths who were only passing by when the Outcasts intentionally escaped. "Can you all explain what happen happened?" I asked them.<p>

"We beat the Outcasts, Chief Stoick," muttered Fishlegs. That I had a hard time believing, almost as much as the story he once had about Trader Al turning into a Terrible Terror. That man might have been a snake and being such a weak dragon might have been fitting, but that was simply not true. Six teenagers were nowhere near as combat hardened as four adult warriors, unless I needed to start issuing competency exams. Yet the fact remained, the moment I had arrived, the Outcasts had already been defeated and the youths were the only ones nearby. They were celebrating by doing a burping contest of all things.

The only other story I had was from a raving lunatic of an Outcast as he ran out the door when I arrived. He screamed "Dragons! Dragons!" over and over again before we knocked him out. And that story made even less sense. I found no dragons. And how would they get into Berk in the first place? It did explain one thing, though. "And the fire?"

"The fire was pretty sweet," said Tuffnut. Nobber said there were only four hostages. I don't know

"Yeah, loved watching it burn through the tablesâ€|" said his sister. On the other hand, I wouldn't put it past the twins to develop a sense of pyromania. Odin help us all. Though I can't explain it, I can't help but feel reminded of dragon's breath when I look at the scorch marks.

I was called in by Nobber the moment the jail had been compromised and the Outcasts had been taken prisoners. I was expecting a fight or maybe a parley to save the kids. As it turned out, they did not need saving at all. Though, I wonder how in all of Midgard did they do it? Well, I guess it was good newsâ€| I needed all the good news I could get.

I then turned to the other three youths, the kids that Trader Al brought with him. While I trusted the girl because of sound testimony, the boys I found more suspect. "And where were you?"

"They did most of the fighting," said Fishlegs. "They helped us escaped the Outcasts."

"Yeah!"

"It's true! said the two twins.

I eyed the pair of them for a moment. While Astrid and Toothless had

said they were working for Trader Al, the two had later said that they were only following direct orders from their superior. Meatlug, the defector, confirmed it. While I was planning to set a trial for them later tonight, the standard branding procedure, to determine their guilt or innocence, I think their actions here spoke more loudly than a heated iron rod would. "Okay, I've seen enough," I stated, "For your servicesâ€¦ Uhâ€¦" It just occurred to me they had not given me their names or anything at all real. No matter how hard we tried, we could not get anything out of them before hand. "Your namesâ€¦"

"Barfâ€¦"

"â€¦and Belch." said the two boys. I just blinked. Whoever named them must have been utterly insane. What kind of person names someone after bodily functions? Oh, rightâ€¦ If I ever see my son in Valhalla, I'll apologize for giving him his name.

"Alright, Barf and Belch," I said, proclaiming my judgment of them. "Because of your actions here, you have proven your innocence. While you have aided in my son's capture, I believe you are not responsible for those crime. Your trial is canceled. In addition, while you will no longer be held prisoner, however you will not be allowed to leave Berk. " The two boys bowed their heads and nodded.

Now that that was taken care of, I left the building, trusting Nobber Nobrains to oversee the clean up. Maybe I should place more guards. Still, how did the Outcasts get out of their cells? They can't have done it themselvesâ€¦

I took a drink from a wine skin by my belt. This was my twelfth one today. Overall, that was not too bad for a diversion. No one died and the kids managed to beat their way to freedom unharmed. I needed a good diversion every now and again to keep me from thinking too much, thinking about my son.

I could have been moping around, lamenting that my life was so thoroughly cursed. Work was a perfect source of distraction, giving me something to think about other than the fate of my son. Before, I would be complaining about the backaches caused by traveling back and forth around the village settling everything from wedding disputes and shipwrighting. It's been days since my son's capture and I struggled with pulling myself together. Overall, I imagine I am dealing it better than when I lost Val.

I drank from the wineskin, until it was empty. Technically, it was a 'meadskin', but I did not care about such things. "Stoick!" I heard someone call to me. I turned and found Gobber running toward me. "Stoick there's a ship sailing in."

"Ships come and go all the time, Gobber," I replied.. " We might have beefed up harbor security ever since Al was found to be nothing but a snake, but we were still accepting visitors. We were just more cautious about who we accept into the harbor. Though I wanted to be informed about who's docking on Berk's shores, I might need to consider making a chief harbor manager position to handle this sort of thing.

"But Stoick."

"So long as I am informed about them, everything should be fine" I said.

"Stoick, there's a _dragon _about that craft." I paused, paying attention to my best friends words. "Was by the docks when it all happened. The men say they caught sight of a dragon aboard that ship's deck." I tried to understand what kind of ship would have a dragon aboard it. Had some crazy lunatic somehow befriended a dragon? Or was this a slaver willing to share a unique price? Likely, it was just a merchant that got lucky and ensnared it and wants to get rid of it" I needed more information.

"Give me details, Gobber."

Gobber spent some time regaining his breath. Men of our age start to get worn out after something like running. "Right, the dragon. Well, we're not sure what it is" but the guys think it's a Night Fury." I was definitely interested now. Night Furies were important enough that the mere mention of their involvement was serious. "As for the ship, we're pretty sure it's a Bog Burglar make." Now why would Bog Burglars have a Night Fury? Did they find its den and steal it away or something? And why would they go here.

"Alright, I'll be there," I said, checking if my sword was still on my belt.

I made my way to the docks, with purpose. What started out as a rather mundane day was proving to be quite out of the ordinary. First an unexplained jailbreak foiled by six teenagers and then a dragon on a Bog Burglar ship. Still, it was a good way to spend an afternoon.

The ship was still a few minutes out, by the time I arrived. I used my spyglass to confirm Gobber's claims. He was correct. I get the Bogs tended to do crazy things, but what kind of insanity possessed them to have a dragon board the ship? One wrong move" well, at least they get a proper burial. A normal dragon is bad enough, but a Night Fury could sink ships with a single blow. We learned about that when we had to salvage the ships in Fort Sinister.

As the ship sailed ever close, I prepared accordingly. "I want a perimeter defense on the Harbor! Marksmen, take the high ground advantage on the cliffs, if that dragon takes flight, shoot it down! All noncombatants, clear the area!" I barked. The villagers and warriors of Berk did as they were told. If we were facing a Night Fury, I wanted us to be ready for it. This was a standard defense of the harbor. Warriors with shields formed the defensive bulk that would hold ground, marksmen armed with crossbows would take down targets using the terrain to their advantage.

With shield and sword in hand, I waited cautiously for the ship's approach. The moment it docked, women from all over tied the ship to the pier and deployed the landing plank. This was expected, Bog Burglars only let women become sailors. Bog Burglar ship, Bog Burglar sailors.

I saw the dragon aboard the ship look at me intently. It was strange seeing this dragon. It was most likely a Night Fury. It was clearly not bound, not tied up, yet it did nothing. It just sat there on the deck, staring at me. There were no displays of hostility, no roars,

no cries. Just looking at me. That was very undragon like behavior.

However, that was not the only surprise. Aside from the sailors who tied the ship to port, the first people to walk of the boarding plank were Toothless and Astrid. They disappeared last night, their only trace being a letter informing me they had went to rescue Hiccup. Why they had a Bog Burglar ship aiding them was anyone's guess, but now they had returned nearly a day later. The two of them waved hands at the ship's captain, apparently it was Camicazi, Bertha's girl and Heir of all people, while they disembarked. Did that mean they saved my son? I tried to look away from the dragon, a sinking feeling in my stomach. I went over to them, leaving my forces behind me. "Toothless, Astrid?" The duo nodded lazily. Both clearly looked tired and exhausted.

"We're back!" said Toothless. "And we saved Hiccup!" Unfortunately I did not want my fears to be true. The black scaled dragon disembarked as well. He looked at me, clearly afraid of me, just as much as I was afraid of him.

"Chief Stoick," Astrid stated, "This is Hiccup."

My sword arm suddenly felt very loose as my weapon drop to the floor, disarmed by a force greater than even the best sword swing. That dragon could not be my son. Sure it had the same scale color and many of the same draconic traits my son had, but that just can't be my son. It approached me and I backed away a step. I observed cautiously as it picked up my sword in its massive paw. And it did so properly, using one paw to hold the grip in and the other to provide balance. It was giving me my blade back.

I did so, still cautious it might be a trick. It was not and my sword was returned to my right hand. That was definitely not something most dragons would do. "Hiccup?" I said.

The beast gave a roar, the familiar sound confirming once and for all what my son had become. "Night Fury, get down!" said someone in the defensive lines, prompting everyone to fearfully take cover, even though there was no attack being made.

"Hiccup can't talk anymore!" supplied Toothless. "He's still himself, he just, well, can't talk!" Somehow, I did not know whether or not it was a good thing my son was himself in that body of his. Maybe it would be just better if he forgot what he used to be.

Hiccup, to his credit, started using his clawed paw to write something on the pier, the wooden boards serving as paper to his hand's pen. 'WELL, I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A BIG SCARY VIKING. I GOT EVERYTHING BUT THE VIKING PART DOWN.' Well, that was definitely something Hiccup. Which meant, that my son was still my son. My greatest fears had definately come true.

"What happened?" I asked. I had too many questions, I needed answers.

Hiccup wrote something, again. 'I GOT BURNED.' That was all I needed to know. If I ever saw Trader Al again, I was going to wring his neck and grind his bones. Whatever Trader Al did, it led to my son

completely losing his human form. I could never forgive that.

I subsided my anger once I realized I was gripping my sword too tightly. No, I should be glad. I had my son back. His journey home had taken its toll, changed him, but he was home. I did not even care how it all happened or why Bog Burglars, let alone their Heir, were involved. I was just revealed to have him back, dragon or not. I placed my sword into its scabbard eying my son's rescuers. "Thank you," I told them.

Toothless and Astrid both nodded to each other, saying something in secret. "Well, we had help," said the Hofferson girl.

Then, Toothless reached in his pack, trying to search for something. Once he appeared to have the item he was looking for, the boy spoke up, "My mother helped us." I smirked. Ever since I had met the boy, it was clear that he and his family were trustworthy people. He had always aided my son in the worst of times, even going so far as to go after a wanted criminal and a backstabber. I shouldn't expect any less from his family as a whole. "Which is kind of the problem."

I frowned. "And how is your mother helping us a problem?" Maybe she had gotten injured or something and she needed medical assistance. Of course, it would only be fair that I aided her in her time of need.

"It's difficult to explain," said Toothless. "So I'll show you." And so the boy, revealed the item to me. For a moment, I doubted if it was what I thought it was. There were maybe a thousand gems just like it in the Barbaric Archipelago, but the shine and luster seemed as unique to me as the faces of each and every man and woman on Berk. It was a ruby gemstone that formed the shape of a tear. If it had the other half, they would together form a heart. The Ruby Heart was an item my long deceased wife had split into two parts to share with an old rival and friend of mine. They had a special agreement, the gems signified a distress call; if either of them were in grave danger, they would deliver their half of the Ruby Heart to signal the other to aid them. When I married Val all those years ago, I decided to partake in that same agreement, mostly as a gesture of goodwill to my old rival. I never received either of those gems in the previous years.

I picked the gemstone from the boy's hand, examining it more thoroughly. Was Toothless the son of Humongously Hotshot the Hero? But didn't Toothless say he got it from his mother? Maybe his mother was Humongous's widow. "Where did you get this?"

"My mother told me to give this to you," Toothless opened his mouth and definitely tried to say something but struggled to say it. It must have been important.

"Out with it boy," I said cupping the gem.

Hiccup gave a groan, he too was clearly frustrated with the boy's struggle, even though I could no longer understand my own son. Though, that was not exactly something new was it?

"Father," said the boy finally. Father? Why did he say that? That made no sense at all. Was the boy's father here. He continued, "Father, you are my father." I tried to process that. It felt

strange, almost bizarre. Did that boy just call me 'father'? He spoke, again. "My mother wanted me to give you that gem, father."

Hiccup, while Toothless was struggling to speak, wrote something on the pier, again. "WE MET MOM, OUR MOM."

I was struggling to understand. Did Hiccup just write that he met mom? And claim that he and Toothless shared the same mother. But that can't have been true. Val had died over a decade ago— though, now that I think about it, we never found the body. Was Val alive? All this time?

This was all too much to take in, I could not believe what I was hearing and reading. It seemed like the crowd behind me shared my sentiments. They could not read Hiccup's writing at this distance, but they could very clearly hear Toothless. They muttered and whispered cries of disbelief. So much had happened in these past few days, but having a boy that had been in my house for nearly a month claim to be my son was definitely the greatest shock we had so far—and oddly the most utterly mundane.

I looked at the boy again, examining him more closely under my eyes. Now that he mentioned it, suddenly I could see the family resemblances. Toothless had the same eyes as me and Hiccup. And hair color reminded me so much my brother and nephew. His face resembled my father-in-law's, the way I remembered it back when I was still a lad. And could see a little bit of Hiccup's proportions, his human proportions, if I squinted my eyes tightly enough.

A few days ago, I had thought I lost my only son— Now, I had not only my son back, but another as well—

Just when I thought the gods were going to stop toying with me.

* * *

><p>Quite a while ago, way back in chapter 9, I tried to write a story in which Fishlegs was turned into a Gronckle— well, it didn't pan out, but I did decide to salvage it for here. I decide to build more on the— customs of the dragons, despite the fact that are in human form. Here, we have Meatlug and Fishlegs discuss the importance of licking. I got this mostly after paying attention to how lots of quadrupeds, such as dogs and cats use it and applied some culture stances on it— People who read Warrior Cats know what influenced this—

Snotlout might seem a bit upset, but think of it from his perspective. Astrid was missing again, with the cause being Hiccup. So here's an interesting thing— In the very end, Snotlout and Hiccup really aren't that much different when you think about it. This is reflected in Snotlout's snippet, where he believes Hiccup is the center of everyone's attention and has to work to get it. Also the way he treats Hookfang (yes, that is Hookfang) is interesting.

Nobber Nobbrains is an import of a very minor character in the books. Characterization and such were not imported, I just used his name to come up with something quick.

****Quick error I just realized, Astrid did not immediately fall over into sleep when she drank the potion, as all the other imbibers This is corrected by having her fall asleep when she got picked up by the dragons.****

****Hiccup's speech originally had dozens upon dozens of ellipses. I decided against it because I felt it would have been redundant with how fragmented the translation was becoming. So none of what Hiccup says is grammatically correct because I intended it to be so, do not comment about it.****

19. Chapter 19

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****Well, this chapter was originally going open up different, but I've decided to place something here in place of that and moved down the opening to snippet #2. Just a heads up, it's confusing as hell when you first read it, but it'll make sense the deeper you go, hopefully, once you understand the context. It's also the longest snippet to date.****

****Please enjoy and leave comments when you are done.****

****Thank you and have a nice day.****

*** * ***

><p>I looked into Hiccup's, no, my father's eyes. He was confused and bewildered. I just told him that I was his son and that the wife he believed dead for overâ€ what must have been a dozen mating cycles. What did humans call those lengths of time? He approached me, steadily. I could heard the crowd practically fall into a chorus of frantic gossip over my revelation.<p>

The Chief'sâ€ my father's shield dropped by the wayside as he approached. Before I knew what was happening, my father's massive hands were around my shoulders. Suddenly, I began painfully aware of how _small_ Hiccup must have felt to live with this man. "Where is she!?" he demanded as he shook me up in the air, before realizing what he was doing and gently set me on the ground. "Sorryâ€ where is your mother now?" he said to both me and Hiccup.

Hiccup looked at me, wordlessly telling me that I had to be the one to do this. Not that anyone else would understand him anyways. I looked to Astrid and she, too, was waiting for me to reveal this truth. Thanks guys. "Mother isâ€" I began to say. I looked into the man's eyes, seeing his desperation. He wanted to know, wanted to know the truth. But could I really say it?

After all, what it would amount to was basically saying, "You wife is a Night Fury and oh and by the way, she's one of leaders in raids. So high up, that only our King is above her and she shares that rank with Trader Al. We like to think of raiding human settlements as 'hunting' and see you people as little more than livestock to be managed. I was hoping to do the same before Hiccup shot me with an arrow!" That would not have gone well with my new found father. Things were so much easier when I thought my father just did the

normal thing and leave during the childrearing stageâ€¦

He stood there, waiting anxiously. What I had to say was the kind of thing that would bring men to their knees. I would be saying, flat-out, that his wife, had literally become a dragon and sided with them for as long as I have been alive, the same dragon that's been breaking down siege towers in every hunt, everywhere. I don't have to know all of the finer points of Viking society to know just how politically charged and how insane and unbelievable that all sounded. Mother was the Chief's wife and must have been as powerful politically as she was to my former Kin. It would have not only destroyed my father's heart, but it would have ruined his life.

But I could not just say nothing, right? "Mother is offâ€¦ traveling," I lied. Just when I thought I was finally going to speak the truth, I was burying another lie on top of it. Father, though I had only known him as such until recently, had suffered more than enough already. The arrival of me and my brother and the news of my mother being alive were possibly the first good things to happen to him within the week. I did not want to spoil that. Maybe it would be better if Iâ€¦ omitted some of the unimportant details. Mother did not give any conditions on what I told him aside from the fact she lived, after all.

Astrid gave me a brief seemingly neutral glance, emphasis on seemingly as my father questioned me again. "Traveling? Where? Why hasn't she written to me?" Well, that was a good question. Given that mother had a means to deliver letters and still could write, it seemed strange she never tried to write to him. It's possible she considered it, but decided against it, either for her sake or, even more frighteningly, _his._

"She's been to placesâ€¦ far off placesâ€¦" And by far off, I mean a six hour sailing trip, one hour if we're talking about flying, provided you know where you're going.

"You mean like Rome or maybe France? Or, Odin forbid, America?" asked my father.

I shook my head, not really knowing where any of those places were, but if that's what my far believed was far enough not to have letters to and from then why not? I decided to stick with 'America' because that place sounded the most far away. "Yeah, we were on America, father."

"I don't think dad is going to believe it," Hiccup said. "I mean, unless you're a Hysteric, most Vikings, don't even believe America does not existâ€¦" Well, what better place to claim as your home than a place that does not exist? I only nodded, not giving him a verbal reply. I did not want anyone else to know I could directly understand Hiccup. That would have just brought up any more questions.

"America exists?" my father said. "Is that why she hasn't been sending me letters all this time?"

"Yeahâ€¦" At my reply, Astrid gave me a small punch at the small of my back. She did not like the fact I was deliberately lying.

Father could only sigh at my response. "â€¦ Maybe I should have taken Big Job's offer all those years ago then... Heard he came back, after

all these years, but I never knew Val was with himâ€¦" There was very clearly a story to this whole 'America' thing that I unintentionally stumbled upon. While I could have used it to my advantage, I knew so little about what I was trying to use as a cover that it was all fairly ridiculous. "Sayâ€¦ when she wasâ€¦ away, did she everâ€¦"

"No," I replied, knowing what my father was going to say. "She had never taken anotherâ€¦ husband." Not that she had a choice in the matter anyways. "Mother said she did not know she wasâ€¦ pregnant with me when she had left youâ€¦" It sounded so strange to think of myself as a live birth. The only reason I was put inside an egg was because I was transformed to require it.

"Oh, I seeâ€¦" muttered my father. "Youâ€¦ do realize what this means, right?"

I shook my head. Astrid asked the same thing, but she did not have time to explain last night or this morning, whatever time it happened. That could have meant, anything at all really. "No, I don't." Hiccup looked at me, wordlessly telling me that he understood something I did not. He knew something about my situation, everyone did, but I did not. What exactly was so important?

"Wellâ€¦ it meansâ€¦"

"You're an Heir!" said Camicazi, as she leapt off her ship, her sailors at her command following right after her. "Well, sort ofâ€¦ Hiccup is still the first born. But if anything happens to him, well, you take over for himâ€¦"

"Yes," my father said solemnly as he looked at my brother. "Butâ€¦ you might have to succeed me, even though Hiccup is safeâ€¦"

It took me a moment to comprehend what I had just gotten into. I had just realized that because I was Hiccup's brother I also had the same obligations and rights that he did. Among those, being a potential Heir to his Tribe. This was a serious political complication. "But, I wasn't raised here!" I complained.

"No. No, you weren't," said my father. "But it may not matterâ€¦" I noticed that though his face was looking right at me, his eyes were glancing a bit towards Hiccup's direction. My brother looked at me with another glance, there was something he wanted to say on the matter, though now was not the time to do it.

"Look, maybe we should talk about this latter. I feel tired," I said, mostly as an excuse to just end the conversation, but also to finally get some well deserved rest. Even as a Night Fury, we still had regular sleeping hours. The only difference between human and dragon sleeping schedules was when we started sleeping. "I've been awake sinceâ€¦" I must have really been tired, since I can't remember when was the last time I had slept. "Yesterday morning. It's been a whileâ€¦"

"Right," said my father. "We'll talk about this tomorrow, when everyone's all refreshed and ready." And then with an action that was faster than I realized, the man placed his arms around me and my brother. I could hear my brother and I gasp for breath the moment his utterly massive arms clamped on tight on our chests; the fact that my

brother was now bigger than our father did not make it any easier for him in the least, a fact that he choked out in a sarcastic quip. "I'm glad you two are home," said my father and he released us. Viking hugs, while incredibly heartwarming, can leave you with a broken shoulder.

"Uh thanksâ€¦ father," I said. Getting used to calling someone 'father' was going to take a while. I grasped my left shoulder, the place where the man's hands pressed into me; That was going to be sore in the morning.

"The two of you better get some rest, I'll see you both at home once I am done here, alright?" said the Hooligian Chief. Camicazi approached him, likely there was some issue of protocol that needed to be addressed.

I nodded, giving my father his room to work. Men cleared out of our way for us, either by stepping out of walking ahead of us. The warriors that had been assembled dispersed, they were clearly no longer needed and went back to whatever jobs when they were not being called to battle. Some had to stick around though, mostly to explain to the commoners who saw there was a dragon walking the streets. Most of them just decided to bolt to their homes and seal themselves shut with wood and nails. The rest of them had to be told to put away their battleaxes.

Astrid stayed behind with Camicazi. She must have decided to not confront her parents about her recentâ€¦ choices just yet. Not that I could blame her or anything, it was my fault she had to do it in the first place. Did trying to do the right thing and having horrific consequences run in the family? Well, aside from everyone being a Night Fury at any rate I wonderâ€¦ was it really coincidence that every Night Fury within the King's domain was in the same family line?

Thankfully, Hiccup and I had arrived at his home before an angry mob showed up; our escorts were getting tired of trying to keep the peasants calm. They could only handle so many thrown axes and verbal abuse, after all. I was not really sure which was worse, though. They left the moment we approached the door. No one was crazy enough to attack Chief Stoick the Vast's home without his knowing.

I looked up at the wooden building, noting that in a sense, it was my house, too. I was Hiccup's brother after all. My brother opened the door and led me inside. "You looking to eat, bud?" said Hiccup. I nodded, clutching my stomach. Food was a good idea. I took several fish hanging above the sink. They were already gutted and cleaned, fortunately for me; I still did not know all about how to prepare meat. I impaled the fish with metal rods, hard enough that they came out of through the tails. Meanwhile, my brother approached the stairway, retrieving a tinderbox stored near the base.

Humans did not have the ability to create fire from their mouths like dragons did, but they were so heavily dependent on it for so many facets of everyday living; from fireplaces to forges, from torches to cooking pots. Humans required fire to do anything and one of the first things any human has to learn is how to create a fire. A tinder box consists of specially treated steel and a collection of flint. When the flint is quickly rubbed against the steel, sparks are produced, which in turn causes nearby burnable materials to catch

fire.

Despite the fact that his paws were now larger than any human hand had any right to, he still held the flint and firesteel with a firm grasp. If anything, this was the first time in his life he was actually capable of fitting his hands into the metal band. I approached my brother as he began trying to scratch the flint against the steel, trying form a spark to light the hearth.

It is not an easy process. It was not like humans could just rub wooden stick against an abrasive surface and instantly light a small blaze. No, it was difficult and time consuming, and utterly without guarantee. "This flint's not good," muttered Hiccup as the tiny piece of flint eroded away into a tiny stone no bigger than my finger nail. He had spent a good few minutes trying to start the fire.

Despite using the proper technique, my brother was definitely having a hard time trying to light the fire. So, I suggested an easy solution. "Just use your Breath," I recommended.

Hiccup seemed somewhat depressed by my suggestion, but he did so, putting away the tinderbox. My brother breathed in and a small, fragmented embers. Though he succeeded in starting a small bonfire, I realized why my brother was so hesitant. He was embarrassed.

My brother backed away from the flame, panting heavily from what was supposed to be just a simple, easy to do task. Not only that, but I noted his fire justâ€¦ was not focused in anyway. It was neither a gout of flame or a a concentrated sphere of destruction, as a Night Fury's fully unleashed Breath would have taken the form of. It was just small embers, barely brighter than the sparks my brother tried to create with the tinder box. I did not press him about that, I had more important things to talk about.

I sat down near the fire, basking in the warm as I placed the skewered fish suspended over the a small blaze. I might have been on the ground, but after spending so much time in the cold and in the dark, I felt like I deserved something warm and bright for an hour or so. Hiccup, sat across from me. "Soâ€¦ what's this about me being an Heir? I get that you're supposed to inherit the title fromâ€¦ father, but last I checked, aren't you supposed to be the one to take the position?"

Hiccup snorted, "As if anyone believed I would ever have been Chief. Ask most people, they'd say either Snotlout or Astrid would take the job when dad steps down. Thoughâ€¦ I think people who would want direct succession would prefer you." He gave me a wry smile as he looked at me, "Besides, I think you'd make a better Chief than I ever couldâ€¦"

I frowned. "No, I wouldn't."

"You're the crowd favorite," Hiccup stated. "Even before we knew about this, people thought highly of you. I had to win a fight against six people before people started to think of me in a positive fashion. On top of thatâ€¦ you're human. No one except the utterly insane would accept a dragon for Chief."

"I'm not going to be Chief!" I refused. "You're supposed to be the future Chief."

"I'm supposed to be a lot of things," said Hiccup as he stared into the blaze, a bitter tone emanating from his mouth. "I was supposed to be called 'the Hope and Heir to the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans', instead I was and always will be 'Hiccup the Useless'. Even as a dragon, I am still completely uselessâ€¦" Suddenly, this was not just about being me being an Heir. Then, my brother backed away and shook his head. "Sorry, it's my head, things are really messed up in there. It's driving me crazy trying to sort things out."

I just stared at the fish as they began to melt, trying to figure out how to respond to him. It wasâ€¦ difficult to think up of anything. My brother had just after all had his mind break free from something my King had done to him. While my Lord said that my brother was able to fight off whatever enchantment he placed upon him, I did not think he was unscathed. "Hiccupâ€¦ brother," I said. I had his attention, but did I really have it? "What's wrong?"

"It's just my memories, the ones thatâ€¦ are not real," he said, faint tones of sadness and grief coming from him. "In them, I saw myself, butâ€¦ different."

"Like how?"

I rememberâ€¦momâ€¦telling me of she thought of me as her successor, about how great I was, in her eyes," he said. That alone brought up more questions than I'd care to admit. I don't think mother ever thought of me that highly before, or at least admitted to it. Hiccup continued, "All the while, I wasâ€¦ flying, winning races against other dragons, besting foes in combat. I was strong, powerfulâ€¦ _Useful_. But as it turns out, I'm even less useful as a dragon than I am a scrawny ninety pound boyâ€¦"

Both of us stared at the fish for a moment, each not really knowing what to say other than my brother telling me when I was to turn the fish over. I finally came up with a reply just before I took a the fish from the fire and moved them to a wooden plate. "I couldâ€¦ teach youâ€¦" I said. Absentmindedly, Hiccup then took advantage of his fireproof tail and used it to smother the fire. I decided to use that as part of my argument. "Like with your tail, you just need some practice." I then placed the plate of fish on table, but not before grabbing one for myself. I started eating it.

"How?" my brother asked as he drew his own. His paws were far too large to hold onto the sticks the fish was on, so instead he held it in a single, massive paw. Instead of gulping it down his throat, like a normal dragon should, he slowly took bites of each fish. Even as a dragon, my brother _still _felt it necessary to employ what he called table manners.

"We'll start with your Breath first thing tomorrow," I said, in between bites. "Get you used to expelling it, focusing itâ€¦"

My brother nodded. "Well, maybeâ€¦ say, you think maybe I can use it for blacksmithing?"

I shrugged, having haven't thought of that. I was just thinking of trying to melt a rock for a few hours, but now that I thought about it, maybe using it in a forge might have been a worthwhile test. Using fire in a forge would have been hard and less strenuous, but it

would give Hiccup more of what he really needed, control. "Sure, why not?" I replied.

This caused my brother to give a slight grin on his face. "Thank youâ€¦ brotherâ€¦" he said.

Finishing my meal and placing the metal rod in the kitchen sink, I gave a small yawn, feeling exhausted. I sat by the remains of the fire, trying to squeeze out as much warmth from it as possible before going to bedâ€¦ well Hiccup's bed at any rate.

And unexpectedly, my brother moved over to me and curled his body around where I sat on the ground. "What are you doing?" I asked, even though I perfectly knew well what was happening. I just wanted to make sure he knew.

"Iâ€¦remember doing this to you several times, _little brother,"_ he said, emphasis on little. He draped a wing over my body, turning a tool for flight into an oversized blanket. His chest felt warm as I laid my back against it, the fire that was inside of him was comforting. Until now, I had never realized just how _small_ I was compared to my old form. Hiccup had been slightly bigger than me when he was still mostly human and that likely translated to him being larger than I was in dragon form. As far as I knew, he was maybe a foot or two taller than me. If that was the case, I was utterly miniscule in comparison to that. It was like I had become a small hatchling again, when my mother would shield me from the natural elements with her body. But I did not dwell on that too long, I was too tired.

Yawning once more and relaxing my body, I felt my eyes grow heavy. "I guess it's a good thing to have an older brotherâ€¦"

"Good night, bud."

* * *

><p>I awoke, hearing a shrill crowing enter my ears. I groggily opened my eyes, unable to hold them closed any longer with the noise in the air. I dizzily lifted my head up, finding the source. I had a feeling I knew who it was.<p>

Sitting upon a rock, I found a little black scaled creature, giggling and laughing to himself as he gave a perfect imitation of a rooster. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he cried, again and again. The little creature stopped crowing once he noticed I had lifted my head. "Morning, brother!" he cried cheerily.

"Morning, bud," I said, groggily. He did not seem to mind the fact that one of my eyes were closed. Every morning, the first strike of dawn, my little brother would get up on a rock and start crowing; he also did it whenever he got very excited, but that was nowhere near as disturbing. Hopefully, he outgrows it, because otherwise, I don't know how much sleep I would get.

My little brother approached me and gave me a light lick on the cheek. I gave a slight chuckle at his. The little Night Fury was smaller than me, but not by so much. We might have been a mating cycle apart, but no one would have thought of that by just looking at the two of us. Unlike most Kin, we did not grow as quickly as the

other Breeds for some reason.

Although, now I noticed something disturbing. Where was mother? Last I recalled, wasn't she supposed to be coiled around me and my brother? She can't have gone off somewhere without us right? "Where's mom?" I asked my little brother.

He only shook his head, he did not know. I began to worry. Did she abandon us? Were we left to fend for ourselves? Or worseâ€¦ maybe she was going to be gone for months at a time, leaving us to ourselves while she was off doing other things.

Then, I spotted my little brother's tail started wagging back and forth as a dark shadow covered the two of us. I turned around and looked and found who I was hoping to see. "Mom!" My little brother shouted, giddy. Our mother dwarfed both my brother and I, I being the oldest was only up to her knees at my age. Mother walked towards us, a silent grin on her face. Her mouth was held shut and her cheeks were visibly bulging with whatever was inside.

Brother and I gave a brief look at each other, each wondering what was in her mouth.

"Mom, where were you?" I asked.

"Yeah! Does it have to do with what's in your mouth?" My little brother asked.

Mother only grin and nodded, still having that smile on her face. She clearly wanted this to be a guessing game, one which my little brother was all too eager to play.

"Is it food?" my brother asked.

She nodded her head. The correct answer gave my little brother an excited grin on his face. Now we wanted to know what it was specifically.

"Oh, is it fish?"

She shook a no. No, it was not fish. Still my younger sibling was determined to find out.

Then my little brother gave a gasp. He knew what the answer was. "Oysters!"

Mother spat out the contents from her mouth. A pile of fresh shellfish spilled onto the ground. My little brother was giddy; oysters are a favorite of his. He cheered as he ran around the pile, excitedly smelling it. Eventually, he stopped.

My little brother ran up to our mother and began licking at her face and forepaws. "I love you, mom!"

Mother gently rubbed her head against my little brother's. "I love you, too, sweetie. So I brought you some breakfast, your favorite. Do you like it?"

"Yeah! Yeah! When do we eat?" my brother said, as he dug into the pile and began trying to bite the shell of the oyster. Neither my jaw

nor his had the power to bite through it just yet, but that did not stop him from trying.

"Soon, child, once we cook them, they'll be easily opened up." My little brother's tail wagged back in forth from the response. He could scarcely wait.

"I'll go build a fire then," I said, mother did not give me any reply. For a moment I feltâ€¦ odd, like I was not really there. I was here, yet for a moment, it felt like mother did not notice me at all. I left like I was invisible. Of course, I could probably just chalk that up to mother coddling the younger child. I mean, my little brother wasâ€¦ well, little.

I went and found a fallen log nearby. It was dried up but it did not appear to be rotting. I think mother felled it last night, I was not so sure. I sighed. Well, lighting it on fire would have been faster than getting a random collection of twigs and sticks, but it was also more time energy demanding. I would have to keep applying my Breath until it was set ablaze, and Odin knew how long that would take. Who was Odin again? Oh, right. Chief Norse god, four sons, and one eye.

"Hiccup, what's taking you so long?" I heard my dad ask for me. I turned and looked at him. He was in the kitchen, preparing the oysters in a stew. He may not have had the time to cook much, but when he did it was a family effort. It was more enjoyable that way.

Assisting dad was Toothless, my four year old brother, dressed in some old hand-me-downs of my mine. Sitting on the counter top to make up for his short stature, he passed my father ingredients such as spices and vegetables whenever he asked. Strangely though, I could not help but feel he was not really paying attention to my little brother.

I shook my head. No, all I would really need to do was take the logs and set them in the fireplace. Father already cut and dried them last night all I had to do was set them on fire. I was sure I knew how to use the flint and tinder properly, I seen father do it so many times before. This was just my first time ever being trusted with the means to burn down the house. I just hope I did not set things on fire.

I grabbed hold of the tinderbox father set by the fireplace and began making some sparks. It was only after maybe one or two swipes did a flurry of sparks land on the old cloths strewn about the pile of logs, consuming them in an instant. I jerked back out of reflex the moment the blaze appeared. I was not expecting the flames to appear so close to my face so fast.

"Hiccup!?" father shouted.

"I'm alright," I replied. "Fire's up, dad!"

"Good and just in time," said my father, the cooking pot in his hands. He suspended it above the fireplace to let it simmer, only opening the lid every now and again to stir the stew. Already, I could smell the fancy herbs and spices dad managed to buy off of various merchants, like Al and Johann.

Sitting down nearer to the warm fire, watching out father cook, Toothless and I traded a glance. Both of smiled at each other, though mine was feeling quite a bit bigger. We were eager to dig in, but he seemed a littleâ€¦ distracted for some reason. It probably did not matter.

Then dad approached and ruffled my hair with a motion of his hands of his hands. He laughed a little, saying, "Nice work with the fire, son."

"Dad!" I laughed in response.

"I mean it! You're lighting fire like a pro." he said, his laugh growing all the more louder. "Maybe I should even consider that proposal Gobber offered."

"Er, what?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," said my dad. "Gobber had this idea for you to work around the forge when you're olderâ€¦ since wellâ€¦"

"Oh." As if I needed to be reminded. The Thawfest games were just a few days ago and I was not exactly the best Viking boy to compete in my ageâ€¦ barket, I think it was. I felt my face contort into a very obvious frown.

"I mean, you'll be fine," said my dad, trying to turn his attention away from me. "Blacksmithing is a very important job."

"I can't lift a hammerâ€¦" Or an axe or a sword. I'm pretty embarrassed after _everyone_, _except Fishlegs_, the only one I knew on Berk who was even worse than me, was able to lift and throw their axes for the Thawfest Games. The only way this would get any better was if Fish decided to have a growth spurt on me.

"Nonsense. Well, maybe not now, but once you're old enough I'm sure it'll come easy to you as the rest of the boys," said my father. He stirred the oyster stew once more, this time drawing a spoonful. He wafted the smell up his nose before taking a sip. "And I think breakfast is ready, son." He put the spoon back in the pot, but instead of stirring it once more, he took pot from its place and put it in the center of the dining table.

Toothless and I climbed to our seats, both of us eager.

"So what do you think about it?" cheered Toothless. "Being a smith, I mean."

"Well, it's probably better than bread makingâ€¦"

"â€¦and small home repair," Toothless completed for me. It seemed strange how he knew I was going to say that, but on the other hand, he was my little brother. He probably listened to everything I said.

Dad came back around and placed two bowls on the table. And only two. Dad and I had one each and he poured some oyster stew into each of them, yet strangely Toothless did not receive any. It was as if my dad was ignoring the fact Toothless existed. Though my little brother had a plan to make up for it, instead he tried to claim the leftovers

in the cooking pot for his own.

I only had to look at him and say a few stern words before he stopped. "No, Toothless, not the cooking pot."

"You're a mean brother," he said with his arms crossed. He pushed the pot back away.

I gave him my bowl after having only a single oyster for myself. "Here, have mine."

"Really?" he questioned, his guard lazing for a moment.

"Well, I guess I'm not cut out to be a mean brother after all." Besides, it's not like I really ate all that much to begin with.

Toothless gave a smirk and then started eating. Because the oysters were cooked, they were now easily to pull apart. Before cooking, even my dad would have been hard pressed to pull open an oyster without any of the special tools needed to do it. Cooking them made it so that even I could pull them apart with only a spoon.

Dad did not seem to be paying attention at all to our antics or the fact that I was going to leave the table having only a single oyster. Though he still spoke to me, it was just on something else. "Oh, that reminds me, your grandfather said he wants to see you."

"What could grandpa want?" I asked. Everyone called him Old Wrinkly and he was the one man who lived farther from the village than even Mildew did. He was my grandfather on my mother's side and apparently he knew plenty of things most Vikings were not privy to know about, such as strange and foreign languages Latin and French. I spent some time with my grandfather, but not all that much. Maybe I should though, just in case.

"I don't know. He said just he wanted to see you," said my father between spoonfuls.

"Okay," I responded. "It's not like I have much planned or anything."

"Good, you can go once breakfast is over," said my father, still not paying attention to the fact I was not eating at all. Maybe he wanted to make sure Toothless could come along, but all day he had not even looked in my brother's direction.

Once all of the oysters were eaten, Toothless and my father both picked up their bowls in the exact same manner and drank down the entire contents, mostly to make sure they were completely full. Either that or it was to show off who was better at eating 'properly'. "Gee, bud," I said to Toothless as we both walked out the front door. "Way to make me feel bad for knowing proper table manners."

I was right to expect him to grin. "You're just jealous."

"Of what?" I asked.

"That I could actually eat a whole bowl?" Toothless stated. "Uhâ€¦No,

wait. What?" He clearly did not think out his reply and it devolved into a random mess of words.

"Well, let's get going to grandpa's house," I said, as I led us through the streets. It might take up to an hour if we got lost, but that was to be expected when your grandfather lived so far away.

"Hey, uh, Hiccup, you notice anything odd?" asked Toothless once we made our way through the village market area.

"About what?" Well, there was the fact that dad did not even seem to notice the fact he had a second son at all. It was probably some form of parental favoritism. Same thing with mom, really. Except, I did not have a mom. She disappeared when I was very young, long beforeâ€| Toothless was born.

"Oh, are those butterflies!?" exclaimed Toothless, snapping me from my thoughts. And sure enough there was a collection of butterflies floating, each of various colors just right in front of my little brother. Toothless leapt after them. Like a predatory cat, my brother landed on his feet, and readied another jump. No, scratch that. He was not so much a cat as he was a little black dragon, giving chase to newfound prey. He giggled after every jump, laughing all the way.

It was then I realized, we were no longer in the market area. The dirt path suddenly sprouted grass all over, house's spontaneously started growing leaves and became the trees they had once been.

And suddenly, I realized I was not â€|little Herdling anymore. That wasâ€| weird. I was aware that something out of the ordinary happened. Well, I've got to have earned an award for never having a normal day. I knew what things wereâ€| before things suddenly changed, yet at the same time I didn't. I practically _knew _what I lost, in the change, such as myâ€| name. It'sâ€| bizarre, really, really bizarre.

But all the same, I had to make sure my little brother was safe. He could have gotten hurt and momâ€| and dad would not want me to get him hurt. I chased after my brother as he kept trying to follow the path the butterflies led him down. "Brother, come backâ€|"

"No! This is too fun!" yelled my little brother as he kept running forward.

With each step we took forward, the woods grew darker, thicker. I may have been the older and larger brother, but that was working against me as I had to run through thick underbrush and branches. Needless to say, I was barely keeping up with my brother.

Eventually I had to make a move to stop him from running off any further. The first time I found myself have a clear path to him, I opened my wings and leapt towards my brother, swiftly pouncing upon him from my glide. I hit him in midair, each of us making a leap at the same time.

Unfortunately, I learned the both of us were going down a hillside. I clutched my little brother's body tightly, trying to use my larger size to protect him from the injuries of the fall. We both tumbled

down the hill, my backside absorbing most of the fall and taking hits from all of the twigs and brush on the way down. Once we had finished, the momentum of our roll made me let go of my brother, sending him flying off a few inches before landing in a pile of leaves.

Both of us groaned a little, but I don't think either of us were seriously hurt. "Hey! No fair!" said my brother as he gave a pout.

"We have to get home, bud. It's dangerous out here?"

"I don't see what's so dangerous. What could possibly be here?"

I just rolled my eyes. "Look, we just have to get back to mom before it gets too dark out," I told him, but it was clear to me he was only barely paying attention.

Instead of listening to me, he was looking at something behind me. "Hey, what's that?" he said as he moved closer to the object.

"I don't know." It was a thing with horns on it. It shined faintly, but the luster was mostly gone, having faded away. Something told me I should know what it was, but for the life of me I could not remember what it was called. I had a vague impression it went on one's head, but that was about it.

"There's more stuff too," said my little brother. There were a few more strange objects, all of which I could vaguely remember their functions, but never their names. I saw a long wooden stick with a shiny tooth on it, a massive curved tooth bigger than my whole body, and what resembled a wooden disk of some sort. I had vaguely remembered that the first two were suppose to be used for fighting, but the third was used primarily for defense. This was all so confusing and I wish I could just know what I was dealing with. The only thing I was sure of was that there was only one of each different object. I had the strong feeling I knew what each item was, I just was not allowed to know.

My little brother kept following the trail of discarded objects, all of which led to the body of this very large Kin. He, for I could smell it was a he, was a creature curled in the mouth of a small cave. He was sleeping, but no less terrifying to look at. He was of a Breed I had never seen before. His body was long, almost serpentine cover sharp spines and possessing small wings. Most noticeable of all was his oversized head, his jaw alone looked like it could easily swallow me whole.

My little brother approached the other Kin with reckless abandoning, taking a few moments to examine the sleeper. "Brother, what are you doing? Come back before he wakes up," I said, trying to keep my tone hushed to prevent him from awakening.

With a defeated grunt my little brother backed away from the sleeping Kin. I gave a sigh of relief once he was no longer close enough to be swallowed outright. "You're a mean brother!" was his only response.

"Why did you do that?" I asked him. "You know mother warned us about speaking to unfamiliar kin!"

"Wellâ€¦ I know him," said my brother.

"No, you don't. That's a lie."

"I'm not!" complained my younger sibling. "I know him, I recognize himâ€¦"

"Then why haven't I met him?" I asked.

"Well, I met himâ€¦long before I met youâ€¦" said my brother. Both of us looked at each other in confusion, realizing just how impossible that sounded. I was present for my brother's hatching and we had more or less spent our first few years together in the same den. To say that he met this stranger before meeting his own brother was crazy, insane. Unless he was telling the truth, then that opened up a whole slew of other questions.

"You smellâ€¦familiar." Both of us turned to the strange Kin. His eyes were open, but pale. Maybe it was the sound of our arguing that woke him up. His nostrils flared in and out, clearly taking in scents and smells. His mouth opened here and there, exposing his teethâ€¦all of the multiple rows of teeth he had. All the while, his serpentine body inched ever closer towards us; brother and I backed away slowly.

"Big brother?"

"Yeah."

"I think I remember where I met him before."

"Oh, tell me," I said, with as much feigned composure I could measure.

"I think we should run."

"I was about to say the same thing." Then, I saw in my peripheral vision my brother swiftly turning his whole body around and burst into a sprint; I followed right behind him.

From behind us we could hear the strange Kin yelling, "You smellâ€¦Just. Like. Her!"

I turned my head back just a moment to see the angered Kin come barreling at us. Despite lacking any sort of legs, the creature gradually closed the distance between us and him. So, we tried to buy ourselves some time. "Come on!" I heard my brother call as we ran under some brush. The large Kin ate through it with his â€¦unusual arrangement of spinning teeth, but that bought us precious seconds we needed.

We ran as fast our little legs could take us. We were young and full of energy, but that was not enough to keep running from an older and larger creature forever. Though our small size gave us the ability to use delaying tactics, it took far less effort for the strange Kin to travel the same distance we did. Both of us were getting exhausted and the furious Kin did not seem to be tiring just yet.

We tried to buy as much time as possibly by using whatever obstacles

we could find, but we had to do something fast. All it did was serve to delay the advancing Kin just a little bit more each time. We could not outrun him.

Both of us were exhausted and we needed some time to recover our breath before we could run again. But we ran out of room to run before running out of breath. Ahead of us, we could see the small face of a cliff or some other weird geologic structure. All I knew was there was a stone wall right ahead of us. And if we did not do anything soon enough, we would be trapped. "In there!" said my brother, apparently finding something.

As luck would have it, there was a small cave or hole in the wall, one large enough for me and my brother to fit through, but far, far too small for that other Kin to follow us. "Go!" I said to my brother and he darted into the hole.

I followed soon after, but it was a tight squeeze and I almost did not make it in. Never would I have ever thought that being small would come in so handy.

Once I was inside and situated as far back from the mouth as possible, my brother and I turned to examine the cave's entrance. We saw the strange Kin's face looking down at us for a cold, agonizing moment. He could not get through and now we were safe. It was not until the Kin removed himself from our sight that we both stopped trying to hold our breath.

The inside of the cave was roomier than expected, with enough room for my brother and I to move around a bit. Unfortunately, we were trapped now. There was no other exit except how we came in and if we left, I was betting that that vicious Kin would be waiting for us to leave. We were cornered, trapped. "Good, we're safe now, bud." I said.

But my brother did not reply. Instead of looking at me, I saw him looking at the very rear of our little hole and into a wall. He was muttering to himself. "Not again. Not again. Not again."

"Not again?" I asked him, breaking him out from his trance. What was he talking about when he kept saying 'not again? Did this all happen before?

"Sorry brother, I'mâ€¦ scared," he shivered.

I went up closer to him and gave him a small nip on his nose. "So am I, but we'll get through thisâ€¦ somehow."

My brother sniffed up his sinuses, steeling himself. "You'reâ€¦ braveâ€¦"

I laughed at that. "No, I'm not. I'm just crazy." He gave a small toothy grin, in approval. Well, I guess I was not the only crazy one.

Unfortunately it did not last. The angered Kin appeared once again. "Little Night Fury," he addressed. Strangely, he only referred to one of us, even though there were two of us. Was he ignoring me just like mom was? "You are trappedâ€¦ and now, you will die." Then, the creature opened its massive jaws, using it to cover the entrance of

the cave. His teeth spun around, slowly tearing off bits and pieces of the cave apart. Slowly, but inevitably he would reach us and then we'd both be dead.

And to think this all started because we got side tracked from going to my grandfather's house.

And then, we were not in a cave. We were suddenly outside, not in a cave, not facing certain death.

"What happened?" asked my four year old brother, Toothless.

"I don't know." One minute we were little dragons stuck in a cave, even going so far as to even think as dragons would; the next, we're outside our grandfather's house. "Toothless, you remember where we were, right?"

My brother nodded. "Yeah, with us running for our lives from an angry dragon." Okay, so I was not going crazy. Crazier. "But it's strange."

I gave him a confused look. "Like how?"

"I think this is a dream," said Toothless.

I frowned. Okay, so maybe crazy runs in the family. "Toothless, you're scaring me."

"None of this is real," said my brother. "I know that now."

I stayed silent for a moment. That seemed to make sense. It was the only way I could think of that explain the fact we just kept switching back and forth between being little boys to little dragons. "Well, how do you know this is a dream?" I asked my brother.

"Well, it's just a recurring nightmare I had ever since I was little," said the four year old, both of us clearly seeing the irony. It would definitely explain why my brother was talking far more eloquently than any four year old should. The fact I was using 'eloquent' and not 'talks better' was too complicated for any five year old I knew of. Now that I thought about it, shouldn't Toothless be roughly ten years older? Yeah, this was definitely a dream. "Though, I don't recall having you in it before or ever being a little kid."

I nodded. Although if my brother was right, wouldn't that mean I was part of his dream? Or was he a part of mine? Would I fade away the moment his eyes woke up, only to return again the next night? On the other hand, if I was a dream, I was being _way_ _too_ self-conscious about it. "So, then all you need to do is wake up."

"I don't know how," he replied. "I don't think I ever had a dream like this before."

"Neither have I," I said, turning to the door for our grandfather's house. Now that I think about it, I don't think I ever mentioned or gave much information to Toothless about our grandfather. If this was his dream, either he learned it from somewhere else or all of this stuff was made up. Unless we, for some inexplicable reason were

sharing the same dream. I don't think he ever told me he ever told me about his nightmares. Still, I did not see much choice in what else we do other than just wait to wake up. "Think we should go in?"

"If it'll get me out of hereâ€¦"

I knocked open the door several times. My brother and I waited for a moment until the door opened. "Oh, Hiccup, it's you." said my grandfather. "Come, come." He looked rather young compared to most other grandparents I met, his red hair still mostly being red. Toothless and I both inherited his skinny frame and his beard reached past his waist.

I walked inside his house, Toothless trailed behind me but my grandfather closed the door on him, not even realizing he was there; he had to open the door for himself. Why was it that everyone only saw one of us? That might have been a question for another time.

"What's going on grandpa?" I asked. "Dad said you wanted to see me."

"Oh, nothing much, Hiccup," said my grandfather. "I just wanted to see you."

"For what?" I asked.

"To see youâ€¦and your futureâ€¦" he said as he sat down near the fire roaring in the center of his house. He was a soothsayer; he had the strange power to divine the future through various means and his favorite method was by looking into the fire. "I don't have much time left."

I sat across from him, feeling rather ridiculous about the whole thing. According to many people, my father included, Old Wrinkly was a bit bad at soothsaying, not that I had any experience of his predictions for myself. Still, he was my grandfather. "You're going to Soothsay for me, grandpa?"

He nodded. "Well, sort of," he said turning his attention for the fire. He stayed silent for a moment, clearly in a trance of some sort. He only stopped after a heavy sigh. "Hiccup, you're destined for great things."

"Like placing last in Thawfest?" I actually wanted to say something else, but I could not. Now that I realized this was a dream, I also realized that this was a memory. I was reliving my memories as a dream, with very strict limits on the matter. I was not actually in control of myself, when I was talking to my grandfather. Instead, I was acting and replying and even feeling the things I remembered him saying all those years.

I did not even notice it before because I was so wrapped up in the illusion. Really, the only freedom I had seemed to only be when I was dealing with Toothless. I wonder if the same applied to my brother? He definitely acted far more childish when he was speaking to our parents. More and more that crazy theory about the two of us both sharing a dream kept appearing to be the reality.

"No, not that. Listen to me, Hiccup. In about," said my grandfather

as he grabbed my hands. He then proceeded to do what I believed was a palm reading of sorts. Apparently he used that keep track of someone's time. "Roughly ten years, things might get a bitâ€¦ confusing."

"Grandpa, what are you talking about?" I said in a confused and agitated tone. I still did not even know what he exactly meant by that, but now that I had the advantage of hindsight, I could see he was right about things getting very confusing ten years after we had this conversation. Now I began to wonder if he knew about any of this beforehandâ€¦

"I wish I could explain," said my grandfather. "Maybe when you're older." He gave most typical reply every adult said to us kids. I still got, even when I was fourteen.

My face contorted into a big frown in reply. "Grandpa."

"Old Wrinkly, it's time to go," I heard a man shout from outside.

"Who's that?" asked my little brother. He was out exploring the room, mostly since grandfather was not paying attention to him.

"Sailorsâ€¦" I told him. See, the first time we had this conversation, I did not know who they were.

"Looks like it's time for me to go."

"Where are you going?" my lips said for me. Boy, it felt disturbing to have your own body move of its own volition. Although, I did not actually know where he was going, only that it wasâ€¦

"Away, far, far away. There'sâ€¦ things I need to go, boy." And then the old man put his arms around me for a swift moment. Mine automatically did the same for him. Dream or not, I missed my grandfather. And then he pulled away and went straight to the door. "Good bye, Hiccup." was all he said before walking right out.

"So that's grandfatherâ€¦" muttered Toothless. "Wonder why I never met him?"

"His ship go capsized and he was lost at sea when he left," I explained. "This was the last time I ever seen him." A part of me wondered if he survived too. After all, mom was alive and well. Maybe that also applied to our grandfather.

"Well, I don't think you're a figment of my imaginationâ€¦" muttered Toothless, apparently he was thinking the same thing I was.

"I guess, you're not either." Now that I thought about it, maybe the reason people only reacted to one of us directly was because they were memories that were simply replaying themselves.

"So does that mean we're both stuck here? How did this happen?"

I shook my head. "I don't know, all I did was cover you under my wing the next I wake up to the sound of you crowing like a roosterâ€¦ and suddenly remember things like the fact you always did that or that

your favorite food was oysters, which we never brought up."

"Tell me about it," replied my brother. "For some reason I keep thinking about someone named Nã³tt who was apparently the grandmother of someone named Thor. And when I think of the name Thor I get the idea of a red haired guy who with has a hammer and controls lightningâ€| Which was odd because I don't think I had actually explained to him the whole concept about the Norse gods. I really should, but I just never had the time before."

"This I all too confusingâ€|all I know is I was reliving an old memoryâ€| and then things started getting weird." I nodded. The same more or less applied for me.

"So, why do you keep acting like a little kid when we're dragons?"

"I justâ€| can't help it. It's a strong urging," he replied. "I just can't stop thinking about things as they happen... It wasn't before we had oyster stew that I started realizing something was off about the whole situation."

"And that happened because I thought cutting up wood into logs would have been more convenientâ€|" Now that I thought about it, we switched between whenever we did or thought of something that brought up memories. In both of the times we were reliving my memory, I was thinking something that triggered the change. But did that also apply to Toothless's.

Suddenly, our grandfather's house rapidly shrunk inside. We would have been crushed to death if were not for fact we also shrunk down in size. The door our grandfather walked out of started to grow teeth around the edges. We were back in the small and dank little place that we came from only a few minutes before.

Now that I was actually thinking clearlyâ€| I could identify the dragon that was slowly advancing toward us as a Whispering Death. His teeth were slowly grinding away the stone, dropping some of the refuse into our dank little place. In actuality, I knew it could move its jaws much faster, but that malevolent dragon was clearly taking its time.

Unfortunately though, Toothless was once again swept up by his own nightmare. The little dragon tried to dig his way through the back of the cave, frightfully, uselessly tiring himself off to even scratch hard stone. "It's gonna get me!" he wailed in fright. He tried his best not to look at the advancing dragon, looking only as the creature slowly advanced. It was as if my brother had been the little terrified dragon he appeared to be.

"Toothless, calm down!" I yelled grabbing him by his shoulder. "This is a dream." Truth be told, I was very afraid of the whole thing, just nowhere near the levels of fear my little brother had. And he said he had this dream on numerous occasions. I can only imagine how terrifying it was in life.

"I'm scarred brother," he cried. There were a few tear drops falling from his eyes. "We're going to die!"

"No, we're not," I said.

But he did not listen to me, instead trying to frantically try digging again. The sheer terror he was just too much. And I could see why. That Whispering Death's jaws were huge compared to us and they only seemed to get larger as he slowly approached. "Help! Help!" he cried repeatedly.

"It's okay, Toothless," I said once more. He stopped digging, now covered in a faint coating of wet dirt and dust, and turned to me, sniffing. "I'm here for you, bud." I grabbed onto his paw tightly, proving my statement. I don't know much about the life Toothless lived before he met me, but I was here for him now, night terrors or not.

He stopped crying, trying to suck back the tears welling up in his eyes. "What do we do brother?" he sniffled.

"He can't hurt you," I told him.

"But I'm so scared," he said.

"So am I," I said. "Remember, you live past this."

Toothless looked at the Whispering Death once more, his fears still there, but he was no longer paralyzed by them. He stared at the creature and said to him. "I remember what happens next," he said to it the creature.

"The creature did not react, only advance ever so further. He was only a memory of the real thing after all. I doubted Toothless had the kind of con

"Mom's going to beat you up."

And just then, right the Whispering Death rapidly pulled his head out of the cave, just as surprised but the sudden movement as I was. There was the hard slam of something breaking against stone and a face I was not expecting appear. I looked into the face of our mother. "I'm here for you, sweetie," she weeped. "Stay there, stay safe. I'll protect you." And then she was gone, only indication she was still here were the screaming or roaring above us.

"What's going, Toothless?" I asked, confused.

"Well, mother's fighting and beating the Whispering Death," he said as he decided to walk out a like to the mouth of the our little hole, stepping on muddy debris along the way. "I never saw it for myself since I was too scared to leave this cave. You know, I want to see what I missed, it must have been interesting."

I followed him out, careful not to slip into the mud. "But Toothless, this is all a memory of yours, right? If you never saw the fight when you this happened the first time, then doesn't that stop you from having well, remembering it?"

He shrugged, "Then, maybe I'll dream something up. It'd be fun to see how badly that _beast_ got thrashed." Beast. There was a heavy emphasis on that word. My brother, really did not like this dragon, and I can see exactly why.

The Whispering Death's destruction of the cave entrance gave us enough room to make it out at the same time. We found our mother standing nearby us, her back turned and the Whispering Death coiled up in front of her. "We meet again!" he struggled say. "It has been a while."

"You? What are you doing here?" asked my mother. She knew who this dragon was. "Why are you antagonizing my child!?"

The Whispering Death snarled, "This place has my home; ever since we were all separated from each other, I had made my home! Your child was the one who intruded upon me!"

"I tried to find you all!" retaliated my mother. "But my new duties made it hard to find time."

"Duties?"

"Yes," admitted my mother. "I needed someone to teach me learning to be!" this," she gestured to herself, "It's easier if you have teachers, other Kin, who spent their whole lives in these bodies. It's not too bad, their King has asked only for some fish in return."

The legless dragon snarled again, "Kin? You speak like one those beasts. Don't tell me you allied with them."

"I have done what I needed to do to survive!"

"You were the one who started this!" roared the Whispering Death. He charged boldly, catching our mother off guard. She was not prepared to fend off the assault. The creature's attacks were brutal and swift, preventing her from holding her ground. She was forced to evade a volley of spines every couple of seconds as the Whispering Death's combination attacks continued.

But when that proved not to be enough, the limbless dragon attempted to bite my mother. Fortunately she managed to block it, using all of her limbs to hold open the dragon's jaws. And then she decided to use that to her advantage, she slammed the Whispering Death into the cliff wall, causing rock to break and leaving cracks in the wall. The Whispering Death groaned in pain as it tried to attack once again.

Using the time she bought for herself. She took a boxer stance, standing on her hindlegs with her paws held up in a guard, which as far as I knew was a human-only thing. It made blocking the Whispering Death's assault easier, but still mother was caught on the defensive.

"I don't understand," muttered Toothless.

"What?" I asked.

"Mother is losing. And not only that, she doesn't fight like she does," said Toothless. "I seen her fight before, back when I was studying to be a Squire and her style, it's relentless, offensive. Here...it's like!" she never learned to fight... Mom!"

Toothless and I turned our attention back to the fight, just in time

to see the Whispering Death impaled a long spike into our mother's foot. She grunted in pain as she was dropped to the floor, her stance no longer usable with only one working foot.

And then the Whispering Death planned to make the deathblow. And in the split seconds before our mother was to receive a potentially fatal wound, she grabbed some of the discarded spikes the Whispering Death threw at her. With a motion of her good leg, she kicked the Whispering Death to the side. In a moment of clarity, she made a bite of her own, digging deep into the Whispering Death's side.

The Whispering Death tried to throw her off for a few moments, but her hold was strong. She actually stuck several of his own spikes in him, using them to maintain her hold. Even at this distance, I could see the blood dripping and spattering on the ground. In fact, I could practically taste the blood for myself. He tried to struggle for a solid minute before collapsing onto the floor. Mom let go and removed the spikes as she stepped away. She knew she won.

"Finish it!" roared the Whispering Death. It struggle to move, slithering on the ground like a snake because he had been so weakened. "End my suffering, released me from this prison."

Mom turned her attention to her wounded foe. "Why should I do that?"

"Let me die with honor, let me go to my reward. I died in battle, the All Father will have welcomed," said the Whispering Death. Okay, that was definitely important. The Whispering Death was referring to Odin by one of his titles. And he cited one of the basic requirements for going into his hold— or Freya's, but both were places warriors hoped to go when they died in battle. Not only that, but the Whispering Death and my brother seemed to know each other. Was— he also human? A Viking, more specifically?

Instead of responding to that request, my mother turned her back and walked away. "Leave and never return."

"You're just like— one of them now—" Going by the idea that the Whispering Death was really human, that means he must have been referring to dragons. "A beast. All you are good for now—" he coughed, "—is to be another trophy—on the wall."

Mom said nothing. The Whispering Death crawled away to the shadows. Mom removed the spine stuck to her foot and slowly limped toward us. The battle had taken its toll and mom was bleeding in several areas, mostly gashes from bites that failed to connect, but overall, she survived. "Come here, sweetie," she said to Toothless. "Momma's going to protect you."

Toothless complied and stepped forward. She gave him a brief lick to wipe off some of the dirt. "Is the bad Kin gone momma?" said Toothless.

Toothless was sobbing, tears running down his eyes. Mom picked him and held him tightly. "You're safe now, child," said our mother. "And— I'm going to make sure you stay safe, no matter the cost."

Eventually brother stopped crying, but that was only when he had

fallen asleep. Did that mean that he was in a dream within a dream? Or did that mean he woke up?

I tried to call him, wake him, but he would not budge. Eventually I gave up, still wondering why I was left alone. Strangely though, if this was a dream based on Toothless's memory, why was I still here? Why was it still continuing?

Mom eventually curled up around my sleeping brother, providing some warmth and protection to the sleeping child. She wasâ€¦ a very different person here in Toothless's memory than the one I remembered. I still remembered some things, here and there about my stay in her care. Most everyone was afraid of her and she had a strained relationship with my brother. I had to wonder, what made her change?

Mom licked Toothless again, the sleeping dragonling was unaware of what was happening. "I guess I can't postpone it foreverâ€¦ I have to accept the King's offer, he will have his Knight so long as I have the power I need," said Mom. Except she did not say it, now that I noticed. Her mouth was not moving, not making sounds. What was going on? "Ifâ€¦ he would give me and my son the power to defend ourselvesâ€¦ maybe it would be worth it."

It only took me a few seconds to realize I was hearing her thoughts. It was as though I was in her head, understanding what she was going on in her head at the time. She looked over at brother, the sensation of worry appearing in mind. "Iâ€¦ have to make sure you're strong, strong enough to handle coming years. I hope you'll understandâ€¦" A small collection of tears began streaking down her. "After all, he was right. I've been stuck in this form for few years now; maybe I should stop pretending to be what I'm not. I'mâ€¦ one of them now."

That was when I realized. I wasn't just in Toothless's memories, I was in my mom's. This was when she decided to stop being human.

But if this was her memory, why did I have it? Did it have something to do with the set of false memories the King gave me?

Now that I thought about it, mom did want to give me a complete set of memories, to replace my human life. Maybe she used some of her own as the base to help make the process easier or faster. I mean, I don't really understand how memory alteration works, but I imagine creating something from nothing must have been harder than if you had a base to work with.

* * *

><p>I awoke, clutching my head in dizziness. My eyes were blurred but I could make out from the brightness it was morning. My brother and I must have been more tired than we thought if we both managed to sleep from early afternoon all the way to the next dawn. Or it could have been that our dream was just so draining.<p>

For a moment, I doubted it was true, thinking it was just another crazy dream. After all, it was just too crazy to be true; I never heard of people sharing the same dream before, not even the two heads of a Zippleback shared the same dream. Of course, if Hiccup brought up anything from that dream last night, well, I guess we've done

crazier things in the past.

Although, I don't think ever had a version of that nightmare where my motherâ€¦ fought using human fighting postures or where the Whispering Death acted like he knew her. Maybe I did make those things up, I never saw what actually happened back then. On the other hand, it was all so thorough, so clear. It almost felt like I was reliving that event and I just decided to take a peak instead of hiding away in a hole like I always. But if that was true thenâ€¦ I really hope I was making things up.

I was still using my brother's wing as a blanket and his side as a bed. He was still asleep, but I doubted that would be the case for much longer. I removed his wing, gently, careful not to wake him up. I brought myself to my two feet, noticing that my newfound father was preparing something in the fire, oatmeal most likely. He gave me a smile when he noticed me. "You're awake," he said with a smile on his face. "You've been out all of yesterday and this most of the morning."

"I didn't think I was so tired. Hiccup, too."

My father laughed a little. It was still strange to think of him as my father, but it was a bit easier now, now that we were alone and to ourselves. "Well, you boys both deserved it." He knelt down and picked up the cooking pot and placed it on the dining table. He turned to me as he drew some bowls from a cupboard. "You're really Val's kid? â€¦ And mine?"

I nodded, giving him even more confirmation. He probably was still going back and forth on the whole thing, trying to believe as much as he did not want to believe. "According to mother, yeah."

My father sighed. "So Val really is alive. " He placed the bowls and some spoons on the table. I noticed he was forgetting his oldest was now a dragon since he placed three bowls. I don't think Hiccup could fit his mouth in any of them. "Did sheâ€¦ remain faithful?"

As in, did she ever mate again? Well, considering she did not have any Night Furies to mate with and she did not pursue mates of other Breeds, I think she did. It was not really important amongst the Kin, but mating was taken differently in human lands. "Yes," I said, much to my father's satisfaction. I was not going to tell him he almost killed her and placed her head on some wall.

"You know, sometimes, it feels like the gods just can't make up their mind about me," said my father. "I lost Hiccup again and then it turns out I not only get my son back, I turn out to have another son and my wife is still.. It's almost as if they want to make my life as needless complicated as possible."

"Rightâ€¦" I said, not really knowing how to reply.

My father sighed again. "Wake your brother," he said, drawing a spoon. "It's time for breakfast."

"He can't eat that," I said.

"Oh, right," said my father, he had forgotten about Hiccup's current state. Or more likely, he tried to ignore it. He got up from the

table and walked out the front door. "I'll be right back,"

"Get him some fish!" I told him as he left.

Now that he was gone, I decided that now would be a good time to have a private conversation with my brother. I gently patted him on the head, nudging him to sleep. If I had not spent so long using my hands, I probably would have used my tongue. He stirred for a moment, eyes flickering on and off, "Toothlessâ€¦" he groaned. "You weren't kidding about crowing like a roosterâ€¦"

"That actually happened?" I asked. The first thing I remembered dreaming about was getting up on a rock and crowing, mostly because that's what I did every day when I was little. I think it all started when I saw a rooster for the first time and me, being the little kid I was decided to copy his actions. He nodded, which confirmed once and for all that we were both sharing the same dream. "So we actually shared the same dream?"

"Yeah, so long as yours involved the Whispering Death and our grandpa, I think we did."

"Soâ€¦ then what do we do about?" I asked.

"We learn about it," said my brother. "I don't know much about what happened, but I think we'll have the chance to start learning about why. Among other things."

"How?"

"I've set up an appointment with the Meatheads sometime next week. I was planning on doing it after people had time to calm themselves down after I turned that Nightmare human. We'll be going to their library." said my brother. He did not actually use the word 'library', rather he used something very close. Like humans, dragons have their places of knowledge, places where information is gathered and preserved. Dragons were tasked specifically to remember information so that it could be kept, usually it's done in song format, hence why they are called bards. Granted though, humans had books, dragons did not. They did not need to memorize everything. Still, 'library' was as close as it was going to be called in the human language.

The library might have been a good place to practice my reading skills, maybe even learn more about the human world. After all, I had been more or less cast out.

Our father stepped in, thankfully while we were not talking to each other. I glad we did not have to explain why I could understand and talk to Hiccup as if he was speaking Norse to me. Of course, I could just always say it's a brother thing. "Oh, Hiccup, you're awake."

My brother approached our father. "Hey, dad," he said in words that anyone could have understood. Sometimes, words can overcome the language barrier.

Our father gave a small contented grin. "I got you your breakfast," he said, bringing a barrel into the house. While he could have lifted it with only a single arm, he was clearly just holding it with both just to make sure the contents would not fall out. He set it down

next to the fireplace, removing the lid.

"That was fast," I commented. It must have been a most a few minutes since he left.

"Well, I found Snotlout carrying some barrels of fish around. Have no idea why, but I managed to talk him into letting me have one. Now all I have to do is just cook itâ€¦"

Instead of giving our father the time to cook, Hiccup approached the barrel and plucked a rather large trout. Sitting down on the floor, he held it in both of his paws and bit off his head. Slowly, he chewed it, using his teeth to grind his food slowly instead of taking vast gulps. "Honestly Hiccup, even as a dragon, you still try to use table manners." I laughed. Granted, he was eating it raw, but he might have just have been hungry enough not to care.

Father joined in, too. "Only you Hiccup. Welcome home, son." He patted my brother's head. The two of them gave a smile to each other, father and son.

"Someone in this family has to," Hiccup said. Father may not have been able to understand him, but he likely had an idea of what my brother said. He laughed all the more.

Other than that, breakfast was uneventful. Father and I ate oatmeal, as originally intended, while Hiccup kept taking his time with the fish; he was only through five by the time father and I finished the oatmeal. If I was still a dragon, I probably would have finished the whole barrel by now, but then again, food came far less frequently as a dragon. Typically, dragons ate maybe once a day, not the three regular meals humans liked to enjoy. We made up for it with larger meals.

Once I was full, I took a seat next to my brothers' side. Strange how it was only yesterday we learned about our connection to each other, yet how â€¦ natural it felt. But then again, we've been acting the part for over a month. I looked at the smoldering remains of the fire, noting how warm it felt. That was then when I remembered something from yesterday. "Hey, dad, is it safe for Hiccup to go out?"

"Uh, yes," he said, caught off guard with my sudden question. "Had to tell everyone last night but yes, everyoneâ€¦ knows he is still my son."

"Good," I said, lifting myself up. Hiccup did the same, although he had to walk on all fours. We both made our way to the front door, our intention to leave the house.

"Wait, where are you going?" asked father.

"Gobber really needs more than just me being his apprentice," I said. It had to be said I was nowhere near good as Hiccup. Besides, we had to practice fire breathing somewhere where it could be constructive.

"Oh, justâ€¦ don't burn down the village, okay?" said dad, "I mean, one of you has got dragon breath after all..."

Hiccup's face contorted into a smirk before he stepped out the house. Dad may not be able to understand, but I still did. "As if I needed the power to breathe fire to do that."

* * *

><p>For those of you who are book savvy, you probably could see what inspired the hilarious excuse Toothless made up involving 'America'. I know it's a crazy anarchism, since it was called 'NewFoundLand' by the Vikings (and Amerigo was not born yet), but it's something Cressida Cowell had in the books, so I am using it for "Rule of Funny". Besides, everything's translated already.

And no, America or the Hysterics are not involved in this story, they are mostly there to flesh out the setting. If I ever do pull out America for any reason, such as say a sequel or a side story, well, then we'll get to enjoy, among other things, Native American dragons (well, winged serpents which lots of people like to consider dragons) and their native shapeshifter mythology (of which there is a lot. Shapeshifters in mythology are universal, everywhere, period.）

A part of me actually really wants to write about a possible AU of where Hiccup and Toothless actually grew up together as kids, either human or dragon. Maybe it'll be a side story or a oneshot on . Young Toothless was incredibly fun to write. I based young Toothless's mannerisms based on the book Toothless, but took quite a few liberties.

20. Chapter 20

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

We're at chapter 20. This chapter was a bit easier to write than previous, so hopefully this means I can get back into writing regularly.

Enjoy and please leave comments on this chapter.

* * *

><p>"I never thought I'd live to see the day a dragon, much less a Night Fury would be in my workshop, much less working steel," said Gobber as I arrived at his workshop near the end of the day. I saw Toothless a hardened rod of metal, with Hiccup breathing a small beam of flame every now again, keeping the metal hot. That was definitely something that I should write down in a book or tell Meatlug about. She'd be ecstatic. I mean, I was witnessing the practical applications of dragon fire in mundane industry. It'd be something to talk about before

Hiccup took a wooden board from a pile nearby him and began to write, "AND YOU'VE SAID THAT EVERY DAY THIS PAST WEEK_." 'Week' was underlined, giving extra emphasis. Though Hiccup had returned to us, there was not a person who could understand a word he said, well, except for anyone who had never been a dragon before. So now he kept a collection of wood for him to write with.

The blacksmith raised up his prosthetic arm and took a small swig of mead and shrugged. "I know, I still can't get over it." Finally noticing me, he said, "Oh, Fishlegs, didn't see you there. What brings you to my stop this afternoon?"

"Uh, hey Gobber," I said. "I'm here to see Hiccup and Toothless." I had not had much time to Hiccup ever since he arrived. We had seen each other, enough for me to know my friend was all dragonâ€¦ and about Toothless. Mostly I was stuck watching the twins and their new friends, the Zippleback boys, Barf and Belch. Since Meatlug and I were the ones to convince Stoick that they were not enemies of Berk, we were also the ones who had to keep watch of them. Now, the twins were bad enough, but with their newfound friends, I think Loki might have blessed them. If there are reports of shoes in the kitchen cupboards and cats suddenly wanting to take baths, the twins and their new friends absolutely had nothing to do with it. Really. I'm just glad they're celebrating the return of their stuffed yak by _staying at home_.

Toothless and Hiccup both looked at me, just about the same time as they dipped the newly created sword in water to quench the heat. Toothless, being the only one who could actually speak to me asked, "Well, it's almost closing time and there's not a whole lot of work left for us to do."

"Aye. Having the two of you means that the work gets done so much faster now; you did all of the week's orders and I barely even needed to lift a finger," said Gobber as he stepped out of his workshop. "I think I might use my free time tonight to see Stoick about something, while there's still some daylight left."

"Is something wrong Gobber?" asked Toothless.

"Oh, nothing really. It's justâ€¦"

"Mildew," I completed for Gobber. Ever since Hiccup came back, Berk had more or less been split into two over the issue of Hiccup. On the one hand, a good majority of the villagers, most especially neighbors and those who dealt with him on a regular basis, supported Hiccup, despite him being a dragon; he was more or less the same boy they always known. The other halfâ€¦ was not too eager to have a dragon, former chief's son or not, live amongst them. For the most part, Hiccup stayed indoors, either in Gobber's workshop or in his own house. Most of them would like to see him banished or have his rights severely limited, but Mildew was the one person who favored that Hiccup be executed, specifically by way of the 'Bloody Eagle'. Now that was a gruesome way to die. On a brighter note, most everyone did accept Toothless as being the Chief Stoick's son.

"I don't get him," said Toothless, anger in his tone, "he's been on Hiccup's case ever since he learned about you started growing scales. I just don't understand why he's so against you. What did you ever done to him?" Hiccup, placed a paw on his brother's shoulder, seemingly stifling his brother's anger in a single move. "Sorry," he said begrudgingly.

"Alright, so enough about that. Watch the shop while I'm away and close it if I am not back in an hour," said Gobber from the outside of his workshop. He left at that moment, leaving us three boys alone in his workshop.

"Soâ€¦ are there any special properties of dragon fire for use in blacksmithing?" I asked. Might as well start with a basic question, something to ease things into a conversation.

Hiccup picked up another piece of wood and wrote, "NO SULFUR, GOOD METAL, NOTHING ODD." Now, I was not a blacksmith, so I did not understand why sulfur was important enough to list, but I decided to take Hiccup's word for it.

"Yeah, I was kind of hoping my brother's Breath would give us access to special metal that could not be made anywhere else," muttered Toothless. "It would've been nice if the metal would not corrode or if it let us make super sharp blades."

Hiccup just shrugged. "CHEAPER THAN CHARCOAL AND FLINT."

"Right. Speaking of, I need you to practice with your Breath some more. Try to keep the heat in the furnace up with sustained and controlled beams, not a blast. I'll show you to do that later." At Toothless's command, Hiccup opened up the furnace and began blasting the inside with fire. Then Toothless asked. "Say, Fishlegs, why are you here?"

"Oh, Meatlug, wanted me to tell you that she's leaving back home tonight," I said. I was dreading this day. Ever since Astrid got back, she had asked the shield maiden in training to break the Deadly Nadder out of the Kill Ring. And Camicazi, a master escapist, got involved, meaning that it was just a matter of looking for the right opportunity to liberate the captive dragon. After that, well, it's not like the dragons would have any reason to stay here. It's not like Meatlug would stay for me. "She wants to knowâ€¦ if you want to come home with them."

Toothless looked at me, his eyes furrowing. "I am home," he said in a bitter tone. He shook his head, calming himself a bit, "Wellâ€¦ it's good that they're going back to our King; Commander One Eye can hardly afford to lose half of his Squires all at once. Thanks for that, Fishlegs, I owe you one." Then Hiccup said something to Toothless, in that strange dragon language that appears to be an assortment of animal noises to us humans. I did not understand, but Toothless certainly still did. His eyes lit up in surprise upon hearing his brother speak. "I guess good to hear my old commander is still alive and well, but now I wish I could have joined him."

"What's stopping you?" I asked.

"I have responsibilities here," he said, "And I can't exactly fly, now can I?"

"NOT ALONE, I HAVE WINGS." wrote Hiccup, distracting himself from breathing fire. "YOU CAN RIDE ME."

Toothless rolled his eyes. "You're still not letting last night's dream go are you, bud?"

Hiccup just grinned and placed the wooden boards that were already written on into the furnace, their job done.

"Dream?" I asked.

"Yeah, ever since Hiccup had come back, we've been having weird dreams as of late," explained Toothless.

"WE SHARE THEM," said Hiccup.

"Only some of the time and it only seems to happen whenever I use my brother as a bed," muttered Toothless. "I don't really get it, but it just sort of happens at random."

"So what do you guys dream about?" I asked. If what Toothless and Hiccup have told me was true, this was definitely odd. Other than people who were divining the future or soothsaying, I never heard of weird dreams like that before. Could this have been an ability of Night Furies? But then, why would Toothless not know about it?

"Well, the first time, we had a look at some our childhood memories, with some not as pleasant as others," Toothless said. He gave a grin at Hiccup before continuing, "But I'm glad my brother was there for me."

Hiccup gave a grin back, nodding. "TOOTHLESS WAS IN A NIGHTMARE; I HELPED HIM." I nodded back, that was enough for me to understand the gist of things. Now I wish I had someone in my dreams to help me through my nightmares.

"And well, after that, the other dreams we had were pleasant, mostly us just reliving some memories, but with the other watching in. Last night, I wasâ€¦ remembering something about mom. She... and I used to travel a lot when I was still a hatchling. I was too young to fly by myself, so I remember clutching on to her back tightly whenever we traveled. We rarely stayed in the same place for more than a week, only stopping tribute to our King. Ever since Hiccup saw that, he's got the idea to have me on his back to make up for my lack of wings."

"WELL, WHY NOT? YOU'LD BE FLYING THEN."

"Hiccup, I'm kind of too old to be riding on my elder's backâ€¦ and you're still a rookie when it comes to flying."

"IT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY AS THE OLDER BROTHER TO TREAT YOU LIKE A LITTLE KID AT ALL TIMES. BESIDES, I NEVER DID GIVE YOU A PIGGYBACK RIDE." Hiccup then gave his younger brother a lick on the face, causing him to give a slight chuckle. The whole argument was silly. It reminded me of two siblings who were close but with one playfully teasing the other all in the name of good fun. And since Meatlug told me about the cultural relevance of licking the face, I felt it was fitting; they were close as brothers even before they learned that they were.

"Say, have you guys thought up a plan to get the Nadder?" asked Toothless. "I kind of feel bad for locking her up."

"Yeah, Astrid's getting her out right now," I replied.

"Wait, now?" asked Toothless. "I get that night is coming soon, butâ€¦ a Nadder does not blend in so well against the Night Sky."

People would see her flying overhead."

"Well, they won't," I said, filling them in on the plan. "Meatlug is going to give her her talisman and sneak the Nadder out without people even realizing who she is. Then once that's taken care of, Astrid and Camicazi will give Meatlug her talisman back and take her own."

"I HAVE GOT TO GET ME ONE OF THOSE," wrote Hiccup. "WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE PROPER HANDS AGAIN. OR TO NOT HAVE TO WRITE EVERYTIME I WANT TO TELL OTHER SOMETHING."

Toothless grunted. "Well, I still think it would have been better if they waited a little later, when everyone was asleep, but if it works, I can't complain."

"NICE PLAN YOU CAME UP WITH, FISH," wrote Hiccup again.

I shook my head. No, I did not make up this plan, I am simply relaying it. "Astrid's the one who came up with it."

The two brother both became incredibly dumbfounded, neither of them expecting that to happen. "Wait, _Astrid, _came up with this plan? Did drinking that potion make her go crazy?" said Toothless.

I shrugged. I did not know she drank the potion, but last I checked, it did not affect anyone else mentallyâ€¦ Except maybe Alvin. "I dunno, maybe Camicazi talked her into it or something; all I know is, they're going to do that now."

"And they say the two of us are prone to making questionable choices," muttered the former dragon.

Changing the topic, Hiccup wrote me a question. "HEY, FISH, DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE BOOK IS? TOOTHLESS AND I CAN'T FIND IT."

"Wait, I thought you guys had it." In fact, another reason I came by was to ask them if I could examine it so as to recommend some books Hiccup could get while he was at the Meatheads in a few days.

"You mean, you don't have it either?" asked Toothless. "But you don't have it, then who does? I mean, father would have told us if he had it, and I seriously doubt Snotlout want to take it."

That was funny, Snotlout stealing a book . The partial Nightmare wouldn't be caught dead reading. That was even harder to believe than the idea that Astrid would create a plan to liberate a dragon.

* * *

><p>What I was doing was crazy. There was no doubt about it, but I suppose after all of the stuff that's been happening in the past month, I guess it was only a matter of time before it finally got to me. I was about to free a dragon, one that I had actually fought against before. Although, with the way things going, it was only a matter of time because I was one; all I would need to do is get hit hard enough.

Camicazi and Meatlug were right behind me, hiding behind a few wooden barrels. No one bothered us, we were practically unnoticed as we

entered the Kill Ring's main gate. With the Proving having past, the only people who were at the Kill Ring the a few men responsible for its upkeep, to keep the dragons fed and ready for whenever it was time to slay them in public, and they were on their way out. The dragons received their last meal for the night just moments ago.

We might have done this whole thing a whole week earlier if we wanted, but Camicazi wanted to wait for a time when the village's guard was dropped. The sudden arrival of Hiccup in the body of a dragon put the village on edge, only subsiding once people had gotten enough time to work it out of their heads or to realize that there was a dragon using his fire breath to keep a furnace running for cheap.

One of the caretakers walked past us, not even stopping to notice that Camicazi had stolen his keys. Once we were sure that there was no one left, we silently made our way to the gate to the dragon holding area. Camicazi opened the gate, letting us in, while Meatlug and I kept watch. It was not too dark yet, but we were sure that there that there were not any guards watching us break in. We slipped inside, sure that no one was watching.

The dragons were all busy eating their meals, mostly spoiled fish and table scraps. All of them were in tight cages deliberately designed to give them hardly any room at all to move. It was easier to store them that way; not only did it make it harder for them to fight back, but that also allowed us to store more dragons in the same space. Some of them had open wounds, likely from trying to struggle against their imprisonment and paying the consequences. And there would have been more of them if Trader Al had not taken the overwhelming majority when he took Hiccup. Now that Hiccup told me about it, I could not help but feel a little disturbed by at looking them. For a moment, I imagined what they would look like as humans, as Vikings, captured and held under similar conditions. Hiccup was right to compare us to Alvin.

I walked, looking through cages with my vision, until I came upon a familiar red haired girl, one whose eyes were locked into a glare. I blinked, snapping myself back to reality. I was face to face with the Nadder, her glare just as menacing as it was a moment ago. Her blue scales were faded and covered in dirt and grime, most of it seemed to have been tossed into her cage. She said something, unintelligible to us humans, but it was not hard to guess what it could have been. Hm, that made me wonder a few things for a moment. Would the other dragons nearby think she was talking to herself? Or be incredibly curious as to transformations Meatlug and the Nadder would endure right in front of their eyes? Or would they all think it was all just insanity. Whatever they thought, I was glad they would not be sharing that with any humans.

Meatlug confirmed it for, "She's very angry at the two of us."

"I figured as much," I said, causing the Nadder to say something again. She definitely could understand Norse still.

"She" asks if you're here to taunt her."

I shook my head, "No, we're here to get you out of here." The Nadder's expression changed to that of shock, which more or less reflected my own feelings on the matter, but I did promise Meatlug

and Toothless I was going to save their friends, even if I was not on speaking terms with one of them. "I know, I can't believe it either."

The Nadder looked at her former compatriot with a look of hateful disdain, it was pretty clear what that was all about. "Look I'm sorry, but I had no choice. I could not let you kill Toothless." The Nadder looked at her confused, until the Gronckle in disguise cleared things up, "The Night Fury of course; it's his chosen name." All that got out of the Nadder was a snort.

"Look, trust us or not, we're going to get you out of here," I said. She was not convinced, but she was still paying attention. She was not going to cooperate as she was now, she was far too upset at me and Meatlug to want to accept our help. It was then I realized I would have to swallow my pride. It was mostly my fault that she was here in this cell. Everyone else was just reacting to what I had done. Now I was in Hiccup's position when he aided Toothless. I need to apologize. "I'm sorry for what I did that night. You would never have gotten captured nor your comrades would have betrayed you if I was not sneaking aboard your Commander's ship. I want to make it up to you, starting now, by helping you escape, if you'd let us."

The Nadder only looked at me, confused for moment, looking at me in the eye. I looked back.

Eventually, she broke away and turned to her former ally. Meatlug told me what she said, "She's willing to do it, now."

"Alright, Camicazi, you're up."

"Well now that that's settled, I can finally do this," stated Camicazi, who wave flipping through keys all time. With a flick of her wrist, she unlocked the cage door, allowing the now complicit dragon to step out.

Meatlug then went into the now free dragon's cage and began undressing, since it would have been torn to shreds the moment she took off her amulet. Camicazi, always prepared for this sort of work, carried a small pack on her for her to stuff the Gronckle's clothes for when we were ready to pick her up. This was all to make sure no one knew we were here, torn clothing was going to raise suspicions, so it was best to get rid of it. I took Meatlug's amulet from her, returning her to her natural state and locking her in the Nadder's old cage. We could not exactly take her with us in this state, so it was best to have her pretend to be one of the captured dragons until we could retrieve her.

I then placed Meatlug's amulet on the Nadder. I had seen people turn into a dragons before, but I had never seen it happening in reverse. At first, I would have difficulty placing the amulet on the Nadder, since the piece of string did not look like it would fit over her neck, much less her head. But hovering the amulet just about her head had already caused small changes to happen. Her head started to grow hair and grow smaller, allowing the necklace to fit more easily. By the time I had the amulet over her now human nose, the only thing left of her inhumanity were her wing-like arms and rapidly shrinking tail. When the necklace was finally around her neck, she was completely human, specifically, the same red haired girl I met when I

was training for the Choosing.

Camicazi then drew a set of clothing for now transformed Nadder, a simple tunic and skirt. She was at least better at dressing herself than Toothless when he first started. Was it really hard to know that trousers went over the legs? The Bog Burglar grinned as she looked at the new human. "Wow, you look rather nice."

The former Nadder looked at her, confused. "What?"

"Well, for a dragon, I mean," added the Bog Burglar, making the dragon appear confused all the more. Meatlug gave a deep chortle.

The former Nadder shook her head, disagreeing, but her follow up proved that she had no idea how was supposed to respond. "No, I don't! Wait, I do! No, gah!"

"Yeah, Camicazi's right. You do look like someone boys would fight over." Particularly with axe and swords.

"When I look like this?" said the former Nadder, gesturing to her dirt and grime covered hands. She may have transformed her body, but her body was still covered in the same dirt it had on it when she was a dragon. "I'mâ€¦ filthy, I had not had a good bath in _days_!"

"So you're a little dirty. That can be fixed." said Camicazi, rummaging through her pack once again. She pulled out some cloths and a small hand mirror, a small brass disk. Never let it be said that Camicazi came unprepared. She gently scrubbed the Nadder's face, wiping off most of the dirt. The Nadder did not fight back, but was rather bemused by the act of cleaning.

I held up the mirror and presented the former Nadder to herself. "Is that me?" she said, taking the mirror from my hands. She was not completely clean, but the majority of the dirt was gone, transferred over to the cloth rag. The former dragon began reflexively stroking her hair, adjusting it til it suited her desires. She probably never had a chance to look at herself in the mirror before now. "I lookâ€¦ so differentâ€¦!"

Camicazi and I grinned as we saw the former dragon groomed herself. I heard that Nadders tended to enjoy looking at their own appearance, but I never knew that also applied when they were in human form. "Well, we better go, before someone notices we're here," I said.

"Yeah," agreed the Bog Burglar. "Only reason we bothered to wipe off all the dirt was to make it look like you were _not_ held in a dungeon for about a week."

"Fine," said the red head, "But I am keeping thisâ€¦ thing until I look somewhat presentable."

"Heh, you can keep it if you want," grinned Camicazi. "It's not like I just can't find another oneâ€¦!"

"Yeah, like on my dresser," I said, causing Camicazi to grin all the more.

Camicazi and I then walked out the Kill Ring with the Nadder between us, just in case she was going to pull off some sort of trick. I was glad no one seemed to recognize her as one of the kids that Trader Al had with him. Otherwise, we might have had to explain to Chief Stoick what she was doing on Berk, and we've already made plenty of excuse. No one really bothered us with anything more than a brief 'hello', so things seemed pretty good.

As I knew Berk the most, I was the one to lead us to the docks and eventually to the beach. It was that far remove place where Camicazi had her ship docked by the first time she took it to Berk. While said ship was not here, it having been moved to the harbor, it was remote enough for our purposes. Plus, it was getting dark enough that people were going to have a harder time spotting the Nadder. "Okay, so take off the your amulet and then we'll be getting your friends here so you can all go home together," I said.

The Nadder nodded, "Then, I have a question."

"What is it?"

"Where are they? What has happened to my fellow Squires? I know of what happened to the Gronckle, but what of the Zippleback and the Night Fury?"

"Oh, Barf and Belch?" chimed in Camicazi, "Well, they're off celebrating with the twins grooming a stuffed yak of all things... while wrestling. I never thought I'd see people thrashing each other over a _comb_."

"Barf and Belch?" interrupted the Nadder.

I nodded, "Yes, that's their names." The Nadder was stunned at that revelation, "As for Toothless, he's off spending time with his older brotherâ€¦"

"Wait, the Night Fury has a brother?"

"Yeah, he's the guy you helped kidnap all those weeks ago. I had to bargain with your King to let him go."

The Nadder was obviously stunned. "Soâ€¦ I have spent more than a week in prison only for my deeds to have been undone by a bargain!?"

"Aye, but that's politics for you," muttered Camicazi. "I remember having to turn down or even return some really good steals because of politics."

"And the King named him 'Toothless'?"

I shook my head. "No, his brother named him that a long time ago."

"Has the Gronckle received a name?"

"Yeah, we ended up calling her Meatlug because we were in a rush." From a boy to clearly has a crush on her.

The Nadder in disguise gave me an incredulous look. "I don't believe

any of thisâ€¦ all of them have taken names from outside of our Lord. Why would my Kin even do that?"

I filled her in, "Well, we could not keep them on Berk if we kept calling them by what kind of dragon they were. So, we had to give them namesâ€¦and then I guess they got attached to them." Maybe the King was right about names. He said that by giving me his name, I would have had power over him, which is why he declined to share his. But what about giving a name to a creature who never had one? Did naming a dragon have an effect on them? Or was I just over thinking things? Maybe it was a purely mundane reason I just could not grasp?

If that was the case, I think I had an idea for a name for the Nadder; mostly because, thinking of her as 'the Nadder' was getting really old and only going to drive me crazy if we ever met another Nadder.

The Nadder shook her head. Camicazi chimed in, "Well, if you're jealous we can always give you oneâ€¦" She was obviously teasing her. "How about we call you the Stormfly?"

The human Nadder's jaw dropped open, "Stormfly?"

I decided to join in the little joke. "Yeah, Stormfly sounds like a good name. So much better and befitting of a dragon like yourself than an odd name like Barf, Belch, or even Meatlug." No offense to myâ€¦ friends or anything, but sometimes I felt like _my _name was the odd one out because of how weird everyone else's names were. I mean, I got what 'Hiccup' was about, that was tradition, but 'Fishlegs' and 'Snotlout'? 'Stormfly' at least sounded _good._

"No, _the _Stormfly," Camicazi insisted with a laugh.

The Nadder shook her head, "No, I am not taking any name you give me!"

"Aw, but why not?" Asked Camicazi.

The Nadder gritted her teeth, frustrated. "It isâ€¦ just not how we do things. Only those who done great things deserve the right to be called."

"So is spending nearly a week in human form in Berk then getting captured and held prisoner not enough?" I said. "You've done a lot, and survived, isn't that enough?" While I was partially joking, now that I thought about it, it probably fit the criteria for getting a name in the dragon's culture.

"That'sâ€¦ not how it works," said the Nadder. "Look, Iâ€¦ appreciate you helping my Kin and I, but I do not think it would be right for me to accept a name from you."

"Oh well, it was worth a try," said Camicazi. The Bog Burglar then turned to me, "I guess we better get to work then?"

I nodded, yeah, we had some work to do. The Nadder undressed herself before transforming back, Camicazi had to inform her not do it out in the open. Once the necklace was off her head, it fell to the ground once her hands were no longerâ€¦ hands.

"Alright, stay here and out of sight," I said to the dragon. However, I noticed she was sniffing the air for something. I could not tell what, but she was smelling something nearby was distracting her. Maybe she was just hungry and wanted to get some fish or something. The meals served in the Kill Ring were not meant to be particularly filling, just enough to make sure that the dragons would not die from starvation. "Ok, fine, if you have to leave for any reason, just make sure to be back in an hour or two."

The Nadder nodded and began making her way to somewhere nearby us. "Well, that went smooth," said Camicazi.

"Stormfly?" I said, "Really?"

Camicazi laughed, "I know you were of calling her the same thing."

"Okay, maybe," I admitted. She was right about that me thinking of giving the Nadder the same name, but not about the other things. "But why _the _Stormfly?"

"Because that would have been awesome."

I only just shook my head, a grin on my face. Sometimes, I wonder if we're twins or something. It's not like long lost relatives are anything I have not seen before.

* * *

><p>So it's all come down to this. Over a week of work and preparation and the day has finally arrived. I looked at the Nightmare, gorging itself on the barrel of fish. It might have cost a lot of money to buy several barrels of fish, but I was willing to pay the price. Although Fame and Glory cannot be bought, you can buy purchase the means to get them. And it would be worth every copper, every silver, and every gold I spent if I was noticed, respected.<p>

I honestly can't do much worse than my cousin at this point... Well, my older cousin at any rate, my new, younger cousin managed to get popular support from most everyone in Berk by just _arriving_.

I looked at the dragon once again. Its wounds had healed and its strength returned to it over the past week. Now it was ready to fight. I almost wish I had someone to watch this battle that was about to unfold, but if I brought its heart or its head to my father, that would have been just as good. And besides, if the fight was not exciting enough, I could always add a few little embellishments. After all, I did have a very big advantage that more or less made it impossible for the beast to kill me with its flaming breath.

Over the past week, I scoured the book for anything that might have been cool to use. I mean there were some nerdy tricks like using eels or grass, but none of those really seemed to appeal to me all that much, except one thing. Apparently, there were designs for a runestone that promised it would aid me against dragons, but it took about a week to make. All it took was a simple ritual involving me carving a rock and placing a few droplets of blood in the center. All I needed to do was have it on my person and fire would never touch

me.

Of course, that was before I learned that I was likely fireproof anyways. Apparently, my cousin was burned alive and all it did was lul him to sleep and finish turning him into a dragon. Well, I guess the latter was a good enough reason to keep the runestone on me; having a snout was bad enough, I did not want to start growing a tail or wings.

On the subject of tails and wings, I recalled that Gobber said that the best thing to do to a dragon was to disable its tail and wings so that it could not fly away. So to start off the little fight, all I needed to do was approach it and puncture one of the Nightmare's wings or chop off its tail.

I approached the creature from behind, my clawed hand on my sword. It was too busy eating to notice my advance. Its tail swayed lazily in the breeze. Slowly, I pulled my sword from out of its scabbard and hung it over the beast's tail. This was all I had to. Strike it, now.

Except, I could not move my swordarm, it would still not let me do the finishing blow. I had to cut off something to prevent it from flying the moment the flight started. Now that I thought about it. It was little odd that despite having both its wings and its tail working properly, it did not fly away yet. Why was it still here? It had no reason to stay here, as far as I could tell. I mean, it's not like it was staying here because of me; that would have been ridiculous.

Maybe I was going about this all wrong. Maybe I should not hamper my foe in such an underhanded manner. I mean, it was as good as dead no matter what I did, it would have been completely guaranteed if I just taken its ability to fly away. No, there has to be a chance for me to fail. It had to be able to fly away. What good was a victory if it was guaranteed?

I sheathed my sword and walked over to the front of the creature, right in front of its face as it finished the last of the fish. I was going to draw my sword right in front of it and declare my challenge then and there. I had my hand right over my blade, but instead of pausing or running, the beast only smelled it, probably curious as to what it was. I took a deep breath and steeled myself before I drew my steel.

I wanted to scream, I wanted to raise my sword and fight, but I could not. My sword's hilt was firmly grasped by my hand but yet it still remained in its scabbard. Why was I not able to lift it?

The dragon, not even knowing the danger, just gave a lick on my hand. It let go of my sword. "Uh, hey!" I said, feeling so awkward and pitiful. Why was this so hard? Why was I so willing to throw away a month's entire allowance for nothing?

Was I afraid of the Nightmare? No, that was impossible. I was the one in charge here. It only lived because I allowed it and it should have died by my hand.

I looked into the Nightmare's eyes, it did not know what I was thinking, what I was plotting yet those eyes seemed to know

everything. And with a deftness I never thought possible, it used its snout to nudge my sword up from my scabbard. I pulled it out, more easily than I could have ever done a minute before. I lifted it over near the beast's head and all it did was bow.

And then I knew what it knew. It knew I wanted to kill it, that it only lived because I let it live and it was going to let me do it. I knew I was not dealing with a beast anymore.

I'm the strongest boy on Berk right now and I can't help but feel weak. My sword suddenly felt heavy in my hands, like I was a small child lifting my father's weapon for the first time. Things would have been so much simpler if I just killed it then and there. But I did not.

I could have easily killed it, presented the heart and head to my father. But could I really take such a life like this? Glory was being practically handed to me on a silver platter and I was still having second thoughts on the whole thing.

Hiccup would have driven a knife through a dragon's head, yet why could I not? I sighed, feeling frustrated and so indecisive about the whole ordeal; I was planning this day for weeks, yet all I seem to be capable of doing is being a complete and utter failure.

I sheathed my sword, causing the Nightmare to open its eyes, confused. It approached me and began licking my boots again. I don't know why but it always did that, every single time I brought fish.

"I guess," I said, "It's hard trying to kill something you partially are." Now that I thought about it the Nightmare had every opportunity to run or fly away ever since its wings had recovered. It also had every chance to kill me yet did not take it. Why? I might never know unless I somehow gained the power to ask it questions for myself, but at the same time I guess I also grew somewhat attached to me.

And then, I felt something slam into the left side of my skull, somewhere by my ear. I tumbled to the ground, face first. I clutched my clawed hand against my head, noting how damp it all felt. It was not a big head wound and it would heal before long, but it still hurt. And no one did that to me and got away with it. I pounded the ground in frustration and pushed myself off the ground.

I turned and looked at my attacker, a blue scaled Nadder that was constantly spouting cries at the Nightmare. In turn the Nightmare stood in between me and the Nadder, its back turned to me.

I drew my sword and charged at the creature, but it fired some spines, forcing me to back away. Then surprisingly, the Nadder used its mouth to bite the Nightmare's wing, pulling the Nightmare to the ground behind it with a swift, unexpected thud, placing itself between me and the Nightmare. It cried again, this time, I could almost imagine it saying something along the lines of, "Get down!" Turning to me, it was preparing to launch another volley of spines at me.

"No!" I could almost believe the Nightmare said. Why was I suddenly thinking they were using words now? I mean, they were still using the

same cries as beforeâ€¦ The Nightmare then using tail to trip the Nadder and get on the ground and causing the Nadder to misfire. Then, the Nightmare got up and placed itself between me and the Nadder, again. I still had my sword drawn and ready to gut the new dragon, but now I could not help but feel little curious as to what was going on. "No. It's okay! It's okay... he's a friend," was the next thing I thought the Nightmare said.

"Friend?" I understood the Nadder saying. That hit to the head must have driven me crazy, I was starting to understand dragons. "I don't think friend is someone who was going to cut off your headâ€¦"

"I offered itâ€¦" said the Nightmare.

"And I chose not too." I said... causing the Nadder to visibly respond with surprise.

"Youâ€¦ understand?" said the Nadder. I nodded. Yeah, this was definitely odd. I was having a conversation with dragons. I am clearly not in the right state of mind anymore.

The Nightmare turned to me, confused. "Uh, wait you know what he's saying? How?"

"Yes. Blame the Flight Commander Terrorâ€¦ who, if I recall, instructed you to go rejoin your grandfather's Flight," said the Nadder. Now that the Nadder mentioned it, I did recall a Terrible Terror riding atop the Nightmare back when it took Hiccup. That can't have been a coincidence. "Not end up a trophy for some Herdling."

"Hey! I heard that!" I said, causing the Nadder to only snort. Soâ€¦ instead of assaulting each other with blades and teeth, we decided to use harsh language. Definitely the oddest way of combating a dragon I have ever heard of. Of course, now the Nadder's anger was apparently more focused on the Nightmare. I can't imagine why, but I can't help but feel a little reminded of Astrid when I looked at the Nadderâ€¦

"I did!" said the Nightmare, "Well, I did, but then my grandfather's Flight received a mission."

"What happened?" The Nightmare stayed silent, clear afraid to answer. The Nadder would have none of that, "Tell me!"

"Hey, leaveâ€¦ him alone." Since I never covered how to tell the difference between male and female dragons in class, I guess the Nightmare was a 'he'. I stepped between him and the Nadder. I realize I must have gone completely bonkers if I was stepping in to defend a dragon from another dragon.

The Nadder just shook its head and said, "This day has been nothing but insanityâ€¦ first you Herd seek to aid me for no inexplicable reasonâ€¦ then you involve yourselves in a matter between Kin aloneâ€¦"

"Well, why shouldn't I?" I said. Her eyes visibly squinted and her tail was being contorted in that tell tale pose. She was going to fire at me.

The Nightmare though placed his wing between my and the Nadder. I guess he must have understood what I was doing, if he could not understand what I was _saying._ "It's alright" she deserves to know."

"Tell me" what happened to our Kin?"

The Nightmare's head drooped in an expression of obvious sorrow. "They" are dead."

The Nadder was shocked. "What!? Did the whole Flight?"

"No, but all of the Knights and Squires, including grandfather One Eye had fallen in battle." said the Nightmare. While I had no idea of what he was talking about, just knowing his grandfather was involved in whatever conflict that happened before we met put things into perspective. Suddenly, I understood _why_ he was so eager to die by my hand.

The Nadder's body turned still as it fell to the ground, stunned by what it was hearing. "Tell me everything"

"Our mission was originally to find and eliminate a new threat that our Lord had dubbed the Usurper. Initially grandfather and I thought it was merely a rogue Kin"we were wrong." said the Nightmare. "We met the Usurper, in the forests of remote island but he had lured us into a trap. We met a Kin there, a small Terror, but it was a ploy, that Kin betrayed us and before we even knew what happened, three Knights and a dozen commoners fell to Herd weapons"Chaos erupted as other Kin who were on the island suddenly started attacking the Flight, against our Lord's commands, causing more casualties" The commoners, all too frightened and confused to fight back, retreated" The Knights and Squires were not too far behind them"

"But the Kin and Herd were working together" with Flight, those Herd were able to launch their weapons, binding our wings, causing many to crash to the ground. The Knights and Squires, naturally fought back, but we were overwhelmed by the Herd arms and Kin supporting them. One by one, the Knights fell, unable to retreat, until I remained. I" I" was the only one in the Knighthood to survive" I was the lucky one. I decided to fly as fast as I could, as far away from the battle as possible. "

"Kin and Herd working together? That's preposterous!" said the Nadder. I nodded, my head, sharing my sentiments. It was not too hard to know that Kin probably referred to other dragons and Herd referred to us humans. Still, the idea of dragons and humans working together was about as likely as a dragon knowing how to read. "Who is this Usurper that he can command both?"

"Because" he is both"and neither" said the Nightmare, turning to me, giving me a sick feeling in my stomach. "Much like this one is" Which meant this so called Usurper was only one person, Alvin. He was the only other person I knew who was" a freak like me; Hiccup was at least lucky he was all dragon.

Then, I saw something overhead, a flock of dragons, one significantly smaller than normal flew over us. Our attention shifted to those dragons and away from this Usurper fellow. Also, I noticed, that the

dragons appearing to be things in their paws, not normal in a dragon raid. "Is that a Hunting party?" said the Nadder.

The Nightmare shook his head. "No, it can't be, unless the Usurper has been dealt with. Our King has declared a state of emergency and has canceled the monthly hunts."

So.. if this King of the dragon was not responsible for these dragons over our heads right now, and this Usurper has a flock of dragons in his command. and if the Usurper is Alvin

I did not stop to finish that thought; I had to warn the chief.

Putting my sword in my sheath, I broke out into a sprint.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Where do you think you're going?!" said the Nightmare.

* * *

><p>I used to be scared of fire. Back when Gobber first took me as his apprentice, I was always afraid of my telltale clumsiness would end up leaving me scared for life. By some act of what presumably was nothing short of direct divine intervention, I never received any major burns until I ended up getting myself blasted by a dragon who could probably sneeze a whole fleet into submission.<p>

Now, things were different, I almost wished I could crawl into Gobber's furnace and lay down in the warm heat even though the heat was hot enough that the metal contraption was almost beginning to melt before I turned the heat down. It was just comforting to stare in at the blaze.

As it turns out, being both completely fireproof and having the power to breathe flames hotter than any man has any right to produce end up being very good incentives to no longer be afraid of fire.

Toothless, on the other hand, was experiencing the opposite. Having lived his whole life not worrying about fire in the least apparently results in a tendency to over compensate when he lost it. Although, he was not too afraid of fire to work around it. "Keep the heat up, bud," he said, pounding the last sword for the day with his, well, originally, it was mine, hammer.

I took a deep breath and sent another jet into the furnace. Before Toothless even, I did not even know Night Furies even had the ability to make a jet of flame since all I ever saw was mom break towers with a condensed sphere of flame. Apparently, it usually is used for warming up a rock to sleep upon.

My throat hurt a little after having spent a week breathing fire. My brother had been training me in the use of my fire breath, a difficult task given the fact that I did not have much in the way of visual aids. I was however making good progress, enough that I could actually directly use it on an item my brother is pounding his hammer on without any of the heat being wasted or risking destruction of a valuable tool. Most of the time though, I just put it Gobber's furnace, storing the heat even when there was no immediate use for

it.

Toothless said it was mostly to build up stamina, enough that I would eventually be able to perform a building destroying blast. Granted, I was not all that excited about that, mostly because I already destroyed enough buildings in my life; I much rather prefer the practical, constructive uses of fire breath.

"Hm, I wonder why dragons never developed their own metal working before, since you know, they can make fire any time they want." said Fishlegs, taking some last minute notes of my performance. Gobber was still not back so we ended up just letting my oldest friend witness how my brother and I started utilizing my flame breath in blacksmithing. Still, I guess being called Hiccup the Oversized Tinderbox was better than Useless any day.

"There's never been a need to do so before," said Toothless. My little brother was the expert on the matter for obvious reasons. "Most other creatures could not even compete to them, and even with steel on your side, dragons are not all that impressed. And far as I know, dragon scales provide more protection than furs, not as much as metal armor, but every dragon has it."

I decided add something of my own, grabbing some of the last planks of wood I prepared for today, "DRAGONS ALSO LACK THUMBS AND MOST OF THEM LACK PAWS THAT CAN WORK LIKE HANDS. MOST COULD NOT USE TOOLS EVEN IF THEY KNEW HOW TO MAKE THEM." That last part was probably one of the few things stopping me from going crazy, er, crazier. My paws did not have as much finesse or flexibility in comparison to my old hands, but I at least could pick some things up with them. Things would have been so much worse if I was say a Nadder or Nightmare or even worse, a Whispering Death.

"I guess that's true," said Fishlegs before putting away his notebook and pen. "Well, I better get home before mom kills me for missing dinner and so I don't miss Meatlug." Then my oldest friend walked out the front door.

My brother and I looked at each other, knowing that Gobber would not be back just so soon. As per our master's orders, we then started packing up our tools. While my brother picked up and organized hammers and anvils, I stopped putting more heat in the furnace, letting it have time enough to cool. I also almost knocked over one of the weapons racks, again. Sometimes, bigger is not always better. Since this was the third time today I almost knocked something over, I had to wonder if I was just that much more accident prone than before.

"So," I said, now that Toothless and I were alone. "I guess we can do some flying practice before we get back home."

"Yeah, same drill as before. jump off the cliff and practice trying to slow the descent for as long as possible," said Toothless. "You know, you're really bad at flying."

"Because I totally had a whole life time to learn how." I said. In addition to the fire breathing, Toothless had also insisted that I learned how to fly by taking about an hour every day to practice. The first day involved him pushing me off a cliff, which I might add failed because I weighed more than twenty times than him. Apparently,

it was the time honored tradition for training young fledgelings. I would not be surprised if Gobber got his teaching ideas from him. Just to humor my little brother, I did jump off the house once or twice before I was confident enough to work on jumping off the cliffs. All of this was done at night or in the early morning though, mostly I lacked the time to it any other time and partly because my father already had enough on his plate without random towns people asking why his eldest son was jumping of the roof of his house.

"I mean it," said my brother, "You're _really _bad at flying."

"It's only been a week," I countered.

"Exactly! You're still stuck doing a gliding-descent, you're not making much progress in controlling your ascentâ€|"

"It's harder than it looks," I replied. I knew what I was _supposed _to do, mostly from my brother instructing me on the proper posture. I had to catch the wind underneath my wings and angle them slightly to adjust my speed and lift. The wind, did all the work, I just had to make use of it; a dragon does not fly so much as it is flown, or atleast that was how my brother said he learned it. But no matter what I did, I still had problems getting myself to rise. We even had diagrams I had memorized for how I was supposed to position my wings and how.

"You're supposed to be past this phase by _day two, _it's been _week,_" said my brother. He gave a deep sigh, "Maybeâ€| it's because you're doing this far older than you're supposed to. I mean, most dragons typically learn when they're much younger than we are nowâ€|"

I nodded, thinking on that. Maybe that was why mom had to ally herself with the King. If she had as hard a time learning to fly or use fire breath as I did, she might have had only chose to serve to learn how to adapt to this new lifestyle. She probably starved or could not protect herself lacking the two biggest advantages in the draconic arsenal. And if that theory was true, she managed to overcome those issues quite well; there's not much faster or more destructive than a Night Fury. "Nothing's ever easy is it?" I said.

"Well, you've got fire down at least, and your progress with that is actually much faster than I thought." commented my brother.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, mother had to spend a whole month teaching me to control my fireâ€|" My brother gave a hearty laugh, "I was very bad at controlling it back when I was little, not that it hurt anyone or anything, just that I tended to burn down a couple of treesâ€| Ever since that, mom had started to make our den as far away from anything burnable as possible." I gave a slight chuckle at that, I guess there were dragony things I was better than my brother in.

We finished cleaning up shortly afterwards, Gobber still had not returned, but we still had to wait for the furnace too cool down. It was not safe to leave it alone just yet, there was still far too much heat inside of it. Neither of us wanted to pour a bucket of water in

quite yet. Note to self, next time, breathe _less fire _or alternatively, build a system to cool said furnace.

"Soâ€¦ why are you not going back?" I asked him. "Last I checked, you were not banished, so you can go back any time you want."

Toothless turned and looked at me, knowing what I was referring to. "Becauseâ€¦ I don't belong there; I am not a dragon. I should be amongst my own kind."

"Well, we could always turn you into a dragon againâ€¦" If Toothless's theory was correct, that the arrows pretty much canceled out the spell that was on him ever since he was born, er, hatched. Most likely we could just give him the potion and burn him and he'd be a Night Fury again.

"And that would be a lie; I was not a dragon, I _never was_," said my brother.

"So then having wings and breathing fire was one big hallucination," I replied.

"Hiccup, you know what I meanâ€¦" said my brother. "Why are you even asking this?"

"I'm just saying, for as long as I've known you, you've been seeking for a way to become a dragon again so you could go back home why aren't you taking it?"

"I _am _home," said my brother, giving the same reply he gave to Fishlegs. "I fit in here!"

I laughed a little, "Yeah, way more than I ever did. Maybe I should be the one to go back."

"Hiccup, that's not what I mean!" replied my brother. He slapped himself in the face when he realized I was not being serious. I was starting to understand why the twins antagonized each other soâ€¦ Now that was a scary thought. I really should tone it down. "Hiccup, I'm not a dragon and neither are youâ€¦ Both of us were transformed from our natural state and you were the one who undid my transformation.

I nodded, taking in his logic. I replied, "But only one of us grew up in Berk; you were born and raised as a dragon, bud."

"But, I am not a dragon now, I should never have been a dragon and neither should you. It's foolish for me to go pretend to be what I am notâ€¦" he said.

Which was exactly what I was waiting for him to say. "Then why are you _still_ teaching me to be a dragon?"

Toothless immediately began to reply, "Becauseâ€¦ Becauseâ€¦" Except he did not have a good way to counter my question. "Okay, fine, I don't know why."

"Let me ask you another question, bud. If you could be a dragon again, would you take that chance?"

"Iâ€| Iâ€| don't know," said my brother. Which also summed up my whole thoughts on the matter.

Mom was right about my skill with fire and flying would improve given enough time, especially once I got the practice and a good tutor. Already, I was exercising vastly improved control and power with my fire breath compared to how I was a week ago; I was already starting to feel more slightly confident about using these new abilities. If Toothless, Astrid, and Camicazi had not rescued me when they did, I might not have even wanted to go back to Berk. I would be far too confident in my abilities to ever want to go back to being just Hiccup.

Which was my problem right now. On the one hand, I could go back to being who I was born as, a weak human heir, but it would be who I felt I really was. It was my true form after all. On the other hand, being a Night Fury, even with the limits of my capabilities being how they are right now, gave me lots of power to work with. I actually had the power to actually impress people now.

I sighed, almost wishing that I did not have to choose. My brother sighed as well, probably thinking the same thing. Neither of us knew what we wanted to be anymore, but I guess neither of us had to do these decisions on our own.

And then suddenly, Fishlegs came barging into the workshop, his face sweaty. "Guys! Guys!"

"Fishlegs?" both me and my brother said out of pure reflex.

"Look up!" he said, prompting my brother and I to exit the workshop and turn our eyes to the sky. There were dragons overhead, flying in circles above Berk. There was no artillery going off just yet to shoot them down, but the three of us began to take note of the fact that Berk residents were mobilizing and arming themselves.

"Is this a raid?" I asked. That could have been bad.

"Looks like one, but those dragons look like they are carryingâ€|" said Toothless as several of the dragons descended. Once they were close enough, we finally could see what their loads were. "â€| People."

"Not just any people," I said, noting that in a split second things can change dramatically. "Outcasts." Suddenly, the dragons then started launching goutts and blasts of flame in almost seemingly random patterns. The men and women that the dragons dropped immediately began fighting their way through Berk warriors who had managed to arm themselves in time.

Toothless, Fishlegs, and I immediately went back inside the forge, just barely managing to dodge a stray fireball from the battle overhead.

"I don't understand, why are those dragons siding with the Outcasts?" muttered Toothless. That was a very good question. Where did Alvin suddenly get all these dragons to work for him?

My brother picked up a crossbow and two swords to arm himself. Fishlegs instead just got a really big shield and hammer. It was

times like these I actually made that ten foot hammer, since well, my haâ€¦ I mean, paws, were too large for my old knives or swords. Plus, I would not even have to swing it around, just holding it would have scared off probably a couple dozen Outcasts.

"What do we do?" asked Fishlegs.

"You three have to evacuate," said another voice in the room. All of us turned and looked at the source. Gobber and my dad stood right out at the entrance of the workshop, brandishing their weapons. Dad was the one to go.

"Dad?" Toothless and I said. For something so simple as confusion, he did not need to understand my words to understand me.

"Aye, you three lads need to get to some place safe."

"Well, you heard them," said Fishlegs, trying to tug me and my brother out. "Off we go." As strong as he was, I don't think he could pull me, especially when I was resisting. We just stood there.

"But why?" asked my brother. "I've fought before."

Dad placed a big hand on Toothless's shoulder. Bending down, he looked at my younger sibling right in the eye. My father opened his mouth, his tone held a confidence, a vigor in it of absolute certainty and authority. "I don't know what madness has caused the events of this day to happen, but I am not going to lose any of my sons, ever again."

* * *

><p>The Bloody Eagle is an especially horrible way to dieâ€¦ let's just say it involves intestines and leave it at that. Best part? It is a real execution method. I'm not going to tell you where to find it, but if you want to, the internet will help you.

One of the reccuring elements of HtTYD fanfiction I end up seeing is that dragon fire can be used to make "special" metals. While I can see the logic and inherent coolness in it and it is evidenced in the show that dragons, specifically Gronckles, have a practical use in blacksmithing, I do think I might be trying to approach this from a different methodâ€¦

Also, Toothless is training a dragonâ€¦

21. Chapter 21

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Well, this chapter came out relatively quickly. Hopefully, I can keep this pace up.

T*here's few authors notes this time. At the bottom as always, but not much.**

Enjoy and I hope to hear a comment from you guys.

* * *

><p>I was far too late to warn my uncle, the Chief, before the dragons fully descended upon Berk. I had to climb my way from the beach; the dragons could just fly over the cliffs. I had just finished climbing the ramps above the docks before I saw that Berk was burningâ€|<p>

Dragons bombarded buildings with blasts of flame, virtually unassailable in the sky. Few of them were close enough to the ground to strike with swords or hammers, but few were being shot out of the sky by bows and siege engines.

The ground battle was one sided in the other direction. Even though the Outcast warriors used dragons to bypass the defenses, they still had to fight against Berk warriors the old fashioned way. Plus, they were likely to get attacked by the dragons as anyone else at this point. They might have caught Berk off guard, but we were used to sudden attacks happening all the time and we had the numbers advantage. At least I hope we didâ€|

I turned by back at the sight, it wasâ€| No, I was just looking for potential threats. Like, like thoseâ€| dragons, right? I did not want to be caught off guard from themâ€| or maybe there were going to be attacks on the harbor. And then, I saw them. I noticed that several ships, their lanterns and torches blaring, were sailing towards Berk. All of them, bore the Outcast crest, meaning that things were about to get worse off. Worse yet, the siege towers were far too busy fighting off the dragons to take aim at them. So, there was going to be an attack on the harbor.

Now, I began to worry about things. The village was on fire and under attack with more fighting coming soon by boat. My uncle definitely needed to know these things, but at the same time, I felt he already knew. And it's not my job to inform him of anything, especially since I am obviously too late to tell him anything.

On the other hand, I had to make sure that the twins, and most especially, Astrid, were fine. Well, Astrid might need saving from me, but I did not know where she was. Probably off with that lousy friend of hers. Pft, I hate her, I still have not forgiven her for stealing my underwearâ€| when I was still wearing them. The twins could probably take care of themselves, especially with their new friends; I liked them. Also, it's surprisingly amazing how much more fun a four way free-for-all was compared to a one-on-one. I also knew where they were and it was not that far away.

I thought of things for a moment, looking both at the rapidly advancing ships and the ever increasing chaos of the battle ahead of me.

Okay, so maybe I should get the twins first, then we could get together and find Astrid. My uncle didn't need me and it's not like he did not have other people to rely upon. Yeah, I had to make sure the others were safe. Besides, wasn't it the standard procedure during an attack by other Viking Tribes for noncombatants to evacuate. As soon as I am done getting the twins and Astrid to safety, it'd be a safe time to leave.

And I probably did not want to stand by the only ways to Berk proper from the docks when those Outcast ships docked. I mean, don't get me wrong; I could totally take on all of them, even Alvin, if they came right at me, right? Besides I mean that did not sound very glorious at all. Standing around and waiting was a lame and safe thing to do in a battle. Only Romans or Greeks would think that was a glorious thing to do.

I drew my sword and dove into the chaos that was my hometown. I did not have a shield, but it wasn't like I really needed one. I mean, I still had that runestone in my pocket, that had to help me out somehow, more than some wooden shield ought to. After getting my fist stuck in on during the Choosing, I am never trusting a shield again.

I ran past several fights, the combatants far too focused on each other to attack me and far too chaotic and out of the way for me to see them more than one big blur of action. I was lucky that the dragons were ignoring me right now, they seemed more focused on the destruction they could bring to the buildings than on the people.

But that lucky steak came to an end rather abruptly. Ahead of me, I saw a large blob of a brawl, dangerous flurry of Outcast and Berk warriors sending their weapons at each other. It was far too dangerous for me to just casually walk past them. On top of that, it was taking place on a major roadway and I did not see any route I could take to avoid them without going a fair distance back. If I turned back now, it would be a major setback to go back down the road and making a turn off to a different path. Worst yet, the Outcasts were winning that engagement. I had to make my move now, before I would be forced to turn back.

So as much as I did not want to, when I had other, more important things on my mind, I charged in my sword draw. "Gaaaahh!" I roared, my sword raised above my head.

I brought it down on an unsuspecting warrior. His helmet was split in two among other things. That got the attention of everyone in the vicinity. The Outcasts recoiled immediately from the display of my superior swordsmanship or maybe my face. I guess sometimes, it paid to look like me. The Berk warriors used this opportunity to back out.

One of the warriors who were engaging my target had this to comment, "Heh, well, I guess that's one way to make an entrance." I grinned in response. Yup, totally worth it.

The fighting stopped for only a moment, the Outcasts were now on a defensive and the Berk warriors were recovering their strength.

"Is that him?" said one of the Outcasts. "He got Bootstrap!" I was about to charge in and interrupt them, but then I realized they were talking about me. I smirked, yeah someone like me should have his enemies talk about him.

"Yeah, I've heard that the Hooligan Heir was some sort of freak, like him." Except, they were not talking about me!

"Alvin's got something against him, I heard," said another.

The first one then said, "Yeah, if we take him down maybe we won't end up, well, _you know._"

"Maybe he'll even fix Bulldog," muttered one of the Outcasts.

They all nodded in agreement and as group collectively yelled. "He's here! The Heir is here!" Well, whatever it was I had next to no clue about, but now I was starting to regret getting involved; Now they were after me even though they were clearly talking about Hiccup.

Then, a few dragons broke from attacking the buildings and landed on some nearby burning wrecks. Their attention focused on me, based on the comments they gave. Mostly they said things like "It's him! This is a lucky day for me!" or "Maybe things can return to normal". Still, I kept my guard up, despite how confusing it was to know what the dragons were saying, but somehow understanding dragons even _less_.

It was times like these that make me realize how glad my father was not the Chief.

"This could be bad," muttered one of the Berk warriors, voicing my no, everyone else's fear. I wasn't afraid, I had nothing to fear. I mean, just because we were outnumbered five to thirteen, with three of them being dragons, did not mean we were going to _lose_ or anything. Death wasn't bad, right? Most Vikings liked the idea of dying in glorious combat.

The Outcasts charged at us, confident. One of them had a shield and was directly running right at me. I responded by charging at him in turn, ramming my left shoulder into him. It was then when I realized I had made a big mistake. The shield was spiked, specifically, a shield with _barbed_ spikes. In most cases, a barbed spiked shield was useless, but against a charging dragon, it was an effective deterrent. If that failed, well, it allowed the Viking to rip into the dragon's flesh and maintain a hold over the beast. Which is what it was going to do on me.

The spikes dug into my flesh, a painful sensation ran up my side. Once, I felt what had happened, I tried to pull myself away from it, but I was stuck. Shields were becoming the bane of my existence. Frantically, I tried to hit my enemy with my sword, but I could not see him. He knocked the sword out of my hand by giving me a nasty cut in my wrist. I yelled in agony, giving my enemy the time he needed to pin me down, using the shield and his height to give him leverage. Using, my vast strength was difficult when my arm was stuck and immobile on a shield, I just had enough control and balance to keep myself standing. Once my arm recovered, then I might have a fighting chance. "I got him!" said the shieldbearer. "He's feisty, take care of the others and we can take him back to Alvin!"

In my peripheral, I saw the dragons approach. Two Nadders and Nightmare, leapt from their housing roosts, They landed nearby and behind the group of my allies. Great, now we were sandwiched, Outcasts on one side, dragons on the other. I really am starting to hate was even more unfair than the Choosing.

And then things suddenly got more fair. One of the Outcast warriors promptly fell to the ground, a flurry of spikes impaling him from head to toe. He did not so much as make a sound other than the loud thud that happened when he fell. A line of fire was then drawn behind the line of Outcasts, causing them to panic.

Everyone was surprised, most especially me. But I think I knew who was responsible. The Nadder and the Nightmare landed on the rooftops nearby, bringing a hold to the conflict.

More of them?" said the Berk warriors.

Gritting my teeth, I shook my head. "No, they're not with the Outcasts," I turned and looked at the Nadder, the one who could understand me. "What are you doing here?"

"We wish to aid you," said the Nadder.

"Why?"

"That is none of your concern, but we simply wish to aid you," said the Nadder. "He on the other talonâ€¦"

The Nightmare continue, "I am here because I must repay debts, my life is forfeit to you," he said, "I may not know what you speak, but I do not think you desire an end like this."

I nodded. Hopefully, he understood that.

"What's going on?" voiced a Berk warrior, "Are youâ€¦ talking to those dragons?" He clearly was not believing what was happening. I did not blame him, I was not believing it either.

"Why are you doing this?" said the other Nightmare. "Who are you?"

"I am the eldest grandson of One Eye, Flight Commander of our King's domain, Squire and guest to these lands."

"And I am she who became a Squire without the benefits of nepotism. My skill and beauty allowed to our Lord to elevate me to this status."

The dragons who were with the Outcasts only voiced confusion. "King? What King? And what are you talking about?" The Nadder and the Nightmare both looked rather bewildered by that but then narrowed their eyes at the opposing dragons.

"It does not matter then," said the Nightmare.

"We will destroy you, for the honor of our Fallen Flight!" said the Nadder. They then charged at them, charging the Outcast's dragons while they were still confused.

With the dragons distracted, the Berk warriors were now free to take on the Outcasts. They charged at the Outcasts, scoring hits while their guard was dropped down.

Meanwhile, all this confusion given me time for my right arm to heal. It might have grown a few scales, but that did not matter right now.

While I did carry a sword, a sword was not my preferred weapon. No, I had something in mind that would help me out against a shield. I drew my mace and with as much force I can muster, shattered the shield. It broke into a dozen different pieces of wood and metal that fell onto the ground; a few chunks were still stuck on my left arm, preventing it from recovering or doing more than just hanging limply, but it at least it was free now.

The shieldbearer, only barely stunned that I broke his shield, quickly parried my follow-up attack. The force still broke his sword. I made another attack, forcing him to parry it with his broken weapon. This time, his arm broke. "This was for the shield!" And then, he promptly turned tail and ran. I snorted, yeah, this was how my enemies should act.

Meanwhile, I turned a small portion of my attention to the dragons as they fought. It was mostly a wrestling match, with all five dragons vying for control. The Nightmare I knew was more than a match for all the two Nadders, meanwhile the Nadder was busy implaing spikes through the Nightmare's feet.

Things changed though once the Nadder started taking aim at the other Nadders. The Nadder simply threw spines at their feet and wings, immobilizing them almost immediately. Then Nightmare tossed them over like ragdolls. They tried to fight back by blasting him with fire. But against a Nightmare? It was about as effective as a passing breeze. They fell unconscious, likely from the fact the Nightmare sat on top of them for a good few minutes.

The rest of the Outcasts decided to make a break for it when they realized the battle was not going their way. A couple of them fell, to the Berk warriors, but most of them made it out alive.

I tried to get the remnants of the shield that were still stuck on my arm off, but they were stuck pretty good. I guess I would have to settle for having to fix it later. Plus, I did not feel like I was bleeding from those wounds all that much.

The Berk warriors turned back once they were sure Outcasts would not be coming back. "Well, that's that," I said.

"I don't think so," said one of the Berk warriors. "What do we do about these dragons?"

"We'll have to kill them!" said another. "They'll probably turn on us."

I cringed at the thought of that. The Nadder and the Nightmare aided us, of their own free will. Without them, things might have ended differently. Itâ€¦ would have been wrong to then let them die by our hands. Besides, I might need them later.

"No," I said. "Theyâ€¦ they're on our sideâ€¦"

"What!?" said all of the Berk warriors.

"They're against the Outcasts and their dragonsâ€¦ that's good enough for me," I said.

"Uhâ€¦ right," said one of the Berk warriors. "I think I might need a

drink. This was all too confusing."

"Yah, dragons working with us humans, the world has gone mad. Think they might be like Hiccup?"

"I don't knowâ€¦| hey, we better take care of these dragons, ya?"

The dragons and I decided to move forward without the other warriors. They had their own missions; I still had to get to the twinsâ€¦| and Astrid; all they had to do was follow me, simple as that.

The Nadder bowed her head. "Thank you," she saidâ€¦| which I only knew of because she referred to herself as one. "I will end the one responsible for our Flight's demiseâ€¦|"

The Nightmare approached meâ€¦| and then promptly licked my face. Eyuk. I wiped some of the slobber off my eyes. Before he could do it againâ€¦| I reached out with my still functioning hand and placed it on his nose, stopping him. My eyes, once cleaned of the Nightmare spit opened to a pair of glowing golden globesâ€¦| The Nightmare and I were locked together, our gazes not moving or even blinking.

In those eyes, I saw myself. I wonderedâ€¦| why was I so weak to bring down the sword when it would have been so easy? I mean, it wasn't like the Nightmare was my pet or anythingâ€¦| Granted, I was practically part Nightmare already.

"Ahem," said the Nadder, breaking us from our trance. "We better hurry up before those rogue Kin notice us. Whatever tasks need doing, so long as it requires us to fight the ones who destroyed our Flight, I will aid you."

I nodded, we would definitely be running into more Outcasts. I might not have been so eager or focused on fighting them, but once Astrid was safe, it would be a safe bet.

I wonder if my cousin has to put up with such craziness like this. I mean, he was practically a dragon already. Did he ever have to listen to dragons talk? And could he talk back?

* * *

><p>A few months ago, I was desperate to prove myself, going so far to invent all manner of devices to make up for my lack of competence as a fighter. While the majority of these things were made to help me shoot down one of the most powerful dragons Midgard has ever seen, I had a small list of plans for devising means to counter raids by other Viking tribes. My particular particular plan I had I called the 'antiship bolas' which was designed specifically to tear apart the mast of a ship, essentially crippling it in the water. I could never get it work though; I could never make a catapult or launcher powerful enough for the bolas to actually do its job. If I did, I probably would never have spent the last five years trying to kill my Mom.<p>

Now though, I did not care about trying to prove anything. Everything I have done trying to scavenge a little bit of glory or personal honor for myself ended up blowing up in my face in truly bizarre manners. About the only good thing that ever came out of all this was that I learned I had a little brother, and even then I am not proud

about having had to shoot him in the guts for all that to happen.

So now, I just wanted to get out of here, get out of the way of the battle. A part of me wanted to side with my brother, to force our father to let us. For me, it wouldn't been about glory or honor at this point, I just wanted to keep Berk and my family safe; I had the power to do that now.

I just had a greater responsibility to take care of my little brother.

"Hiccup, you are a mean and unfair older brother," complained Toothless about this little idea I had.

"Oh, don't complain," I replied, dashing through the wreckage. "Just be glad Dad's letting you keep your weapons." My little brother, in more than way, sat in the space between my neck and wings; Fishlegs was right behind him. They had their weapons draw, ready to defend themselves on this crazy stunt I thought up. It would have been better if I had a saddle to keep them from flying off every time I made a jump, but I thought that even though I could not fly, it was safer for them to ride to safety on dragonback. Plus, my brother did not know where we were going, so I had to lead him anyways.

For the first time in my life, I had suddenly come to realize just how large I was. Fishlegs used to be the largest boy my age, now I felt I was something like five times his size, probably even heavier than he was. As it turns out, there is a few advantages to being larger than I had any real right to. Being this size meant it was easier for me to carry Toothless and Fishlegs. Being stronger might have meant I could lift more, but being larger allowed me to carry that same load with far less difficulty.

Being larger also meant that each step I took was also proportionately larger; I could travel the same distance with far less steps. The same also applied to when I decided to jump—like right now. I spotted a wooden spiked barricade formed from the debris of a recently demolished carts. Likely, it was made to stop advancements against Berk defenders, but it did not do any good against me. It was tall as I was as a human boy and I jumped over it like it wasn't even there. Fishlegs screamed as he held tightly to my brother, who held tightly onto my neck. He stopped the moment we landed on the ground. "I don't know what dragons scare me more, the ones above us— or the one below me—" I smirked, well did as close to a smirk as I could anyways.

A few paces past another set of barricades, I noticed a small skirmish between Outcast warriors and Berk Vikings. The Berk Vikings saw me first, noting how fast I was approaching them.

"It's Hiccup, get down!" yelled one of the men. I internally laughed at how fitting it was.

So it turns out there's a third benefit to being larger...

The Berk warriors immediately disengaged from the Outcasts, who were momentarily puzzled by the sudden turn of events. A few of them realized what was about to happen, but the majority stayed where they stood, a confused and immobile mass, exactly like a collection of pins. I ran through them, knocking them aside. A few managed to cut

me or bludgeon me, but none of that stopped me; their attacks still hurt though, but that was fine so long as my brother and Fishlegs were not hurt. I still threw the Outcasts aside, leaving behind a disorganized mess with my passing. The Berk Vikings then swept in and routed the disorganized Outcasts.

It was probably for these reasons people on the mainland liked horses. Though I had never seen a horse before, since there was not enough room for them on Berk, I heard and read about them. They could be used for all sorts of tasks because of their combination of strength, size, and endurance, but their biggest use was their ability to transport people great distances quickly or plow through an enemy line. Cavalry charges, I heard, are quite devastating, often trampling hapless enemies to death before they even had the chance to react. There was little the Outcasts could do to stop me other than get out of my way. That's something a scrawny toothpick of a boy could never have done.

Unfortunately, I soon realized we were being followed by an enemy that might not be as easy to deal with. A few dragons nearby noticed me and started to tail. Toothless also noticed them, too. "We've got company," he said. I slowed my pace down as he began to draw his crossbow out whereas Fishlegs drew his shield up. If they were going to be hostile, it was good for us to be ready.

"Hey, I did not know we had a Night Fury!" said a Gronckle. "You're so lucky."

"Yeah," said a Zippleback's head. "Better off than us."

"Uh, thank you," I replied. They were surprisingly nice; maybe they did not realize I was not on their side, because I was a dragon. I mean, who really expects a dragon in a Viking village? Hopefully, I could use that to my advantage.

"Say, who are those two?" asked the other Zippleback head. "Didn't you hear the order... from him? We have to burn down this place if well, you know." I most certainly did not know, but I was not going to let them know about that.

Him? Well, they were most definitely talking about Alvin or someone close to him. But I doubt they would actually call Alvin by name and just give him as close of an approximation as they could; the dragon language is notoriously lacking in some words. "Oh, uh me? I just got a different mission is all. Escort these two to a secret place on the island, the boss's orders and all that." Hopefully, they bought that.

One had to wonder how Alvin got the loyalty of these dragons.

The Gronckle snorted, "Shouldn't they have had one of the Changewings do that?"

I jumped onto a roof, realizing that the fire was far less intense in the section of the village I had just moved to. Plus, it allowed me to converse with the dragons more easily. "...Eh, you know how he is, sometimes he makes the oddest decisions."

The Gronckle chuckled. "Yeah, like what he did to us. Honestly, I'm still getting used to all of this." Which made me start to wonder

what this 'this' was.

The Zippleback heads both whispered something to each other,

"Then why aren't you flying? I mean, I get that it's hard the first few days or so, but surely you should have learned by now."

"And it's much faster flying than it is walkingâ€|"

"Apparently, I am a very bad flierâ€|" I said. I could practically feel my brothers gave being directed at me. "Which is why I am on the ground instead of helping in the fight."

"Oh, now that makes sense," said another Gronckle. "Good luck on your mission, then. Hopefully, you can earn the prize the boss offers."

"Best of luck, my Kin," I said, calling them as how I knew other dragons referred to each other. Dragons for some reason always called each other King

"Kin? Why...uh," said Gronckle confused.

The Zippleback picked up from there, "Well, I guess we are at this point, we've all been through so much together. Best of luck, Kin." The other dragons followed suit and gave parting farewells. They all flew away, off for whatever task Alvin or whoever this boss was.

"Hiccup, that wasâ€|oddâ€|" said Toothless, putting away his crossbow.

"Yeah, it really wasâ€|" I replied. We were finally through most of the fighting, the majority of all of the combat was focused near the cliffs and the docks. There might have been plenty of Outcasts and dragons, but they were still not enough of them to cover all of Berk in a firestormâ€| hopefully. I slowed my pace down and but I did not leap back to down to the road bellow. We were not the only ones fleeing. The streets were crowded by the mass of evacuating men, women, and children. Anyone who was not a combatant was to leave whenever a raid from another Viking tribe happened. Noncombatants were often taken captive if they did not run and that was often worse than just flatout dying.

"Why, what happened?" asked Fishlegs.

Toothless, explained for me, because I could not tell Fishlegs anything without stopping. I seriously hope there's a way for me to talk to normal humans without using dirt or wood. "Those dragons were not all too concerned about the fact an adolescent was having trouble flying; that's the kind of thing that warrants plenty of attention under draconic lawâ€| They also did not refer to each other as 'Kin' until Hiccup told them that they were. Which is odd because even those Kin who live in the Far Southern Sea, so remote and far away from the King's rule still call themselves Kin." Which brought up the question on why they didn't. Something told me the reason was just one of those things that was plain absurd and crazy when you learn the truthâ€| if only because that would be the story of my life. I would be amazed if the reason turned out to be something completely mundane or sane.

"I think we should figure that out when the danger's gone," I said.
"We've still got to get to the safehouseâ€¦!"

"'Protected Nest'?" asked Toothless, using the actual translation of the words I used. Either way, it did not matter because both more or less the same thing.

"Yeah," I said. "The Haddock clan has one."

"We have one?" said Toothless.

"Yeah, what do you think Dad did to Old Wrinkly's place once he disappeared?" I asked. Dad used to send me there back when I was far too young to â€¦ help defend against the dragon attacks. Because it was so remote and far away from any livestock, dragons never came there and enemy Vikings would never know to go there. It was not some impenetrable fortress, it's only defense was that few outsiders knew about its location and it worked.

"Oh," said Toothless. He had only been there in that weird mishap of a dream we had and even then, he had never learned the route.

Once we were on the farthest edges of Berk, right before exiting. I turned back to look at it one last time, wondering if my dad and my friends were going to be fine. Dad had to stop an invasion of both Outcasts and dragons and there was still no sign of Alvin. I really wish Toothless and I made some enchanted arrows right about now, Alvin was next to unbeatable even with them.

Most especially, my thoughts turned to Astrid and Camicazi. They were probably done with escorting the Nadder from the Kill Ring and most likely were going to go back for Meatlug. The Kill Ring and much of the area around it seemed practically untouched by flame, the dragons apparently felt it was a low priority target, yet I could not help shake the feeling things were about to go very wrong for them.

* * *

><p>I really should have known things were becoming too easy. Once Camicazi and I had sent the Nadder on her way, we both thought things were going rather smoothly. All we needed to do was get Meatlug out and then we would pick up Barf and Belch, then they would be sent on their way home; maybe we would have even stopped by Fishlegs's house because he's been avoiding her like the plague ever since he learned that today was going to be their last day together.<p>

I just did not expect the sky to rain dragon fire and men. Who in their right mind expects dragons to drop Outcast warriors into combat by air? That's the kind of thing someone like Hiccup would think up. I think more than anything, I was upset by the timing more than the fact that the dragons and Outcasts were attacking. "What were the chances?" I muttered. "We were in the middle of something important; they had to come right now of all times."

"Well, at least, you can't complain today is going to be boring," said Camicazi. I guess one of us had to look at the brighter side of things.

I sighed. One thing was for sure, I did not want to get burned; I do

not want to end up like Hiccup. The last thing I wanted was for my father or mother to suddenly start getting overprotective of me. So far, I've been careful of trying to steer clear of anything that would give me an injury someplace I could never hide it; I had next to no doubt that the moment they saw me grow wings or anything, they'd lock me in my room and take away all of my weapons. I was just glad I would not have to face the possibility of that happening so soon.

Camicazi and I ran a bit more, we were at the final stretch leading to the Kill Ring. Fortunately for us, no one else seemed to be going to Kill Ring. From what I could tell one of the dragons or Outcasts were getting anywhere near close to us, keeping us safe. Berk Vikings were too busy putting up a fight against the invaders. There was no fighting going on there, but it was close enough to the battlefield dissuade its use as a bunker or safehouseâ€ the dragons inside also helped with that; caged or not, dragons were not something most Vikings wanted to be near. That made sure no refugees fleeing the burning village would go there. All of which was fine by me.

We arrived at the gates of the arena, faster than I thought we wouldâ€ or rather, I did. I turned and looked back, finding Camicazi trailing a small distance behind. She stopped running once we were in arms length of each other. "Oh boy," said the Bog Burglar, a grin on her face. "Since when did you get faster than me?"

"Well, we both know Hiccup's potion worksâ€ aside from its side effects," I said.

"Yeah, but some of us don't think those side effects are that bad," she replied. Camicazi huffed a little, recovering her breath. It was then I realized I was taking slightly deeper and a few more breaths than her. We both ran the same distance and though I did so faster, I also appeared to be slightly more exhausted.

"Come on," I said, turning to the metal entry gate.

Except that when I saw the gate, I realized that it was already raised up. When Camicazi and I left with the Nadder earlier, we closed the gate to the arena proper make it appear like we were not there at all. It would have been too suspicious if we left it unlocked. "Oh, that can't be good," said Camicazi. She too knew what was going through my head; Someone else was here.

"Weapons out," I said, "There's no telling if who else is here is friend or foe. Let's assume foe." We both had our weapons out and for good measure we both had torches in our offhand; we needed it as much visibility and offence as we could get. Neither of us had shields, but hopefully, that would not be too much of a problem. Neither of us could see any shoeprints or tracks that gave away the identity of our unknown visitor.

The gate to the dragon holding area was also opened, slightly. Whoever was our unknown visitor, he was here for the dragons, since that was the only thing that was behind that gate. And based on the fact that the lock did not seem to be tampered with or destroyed, he must have been smart enough to come up with a plan for breaking in, most likely he was human.

I nudged the door open, while Camicazi watched my back. Slowly, I

crept inside, first poking my head and the torch into the room. The dragons were still firmly in their cages, all of them looking at us the same way they had seen us earlier. Meatlug though, I could tell with a worrying look in her eyes. Maybe once Camicazi gave her her amulet back, she could tell us.

I could not see any indication that there was anyone else in the room, at least from the door, I could not. I entered fully into the room, Camicazi right behind me. "Meatlug," I called as I approached her cage.

The Gronckle gave a desperate cry of hers. I could not understand words, I could understand what she was feeling. Something had her scared, terrified. Most likely our mystery guest, whoever he may be, was going to do something to her. The other dragons, stayed silent, patient, looking at the Gronckle with a look I could only vaguely tell was disdain. Now thatâ€¦ was interesting. Why were they looking at her like that?

"Well, let's get you out of here," said Camicazi, whipping out the keys. She promptly unlocked the cage doorâ€¦ and then things went very, very wrong.

Before I could realize what had happened, the open gate closed with a loud slam. Camicazi and I were flung in separate directions by some unseen force, away from Meatlug's cage. However, neither of us landed on our backs, we both took advantage of the unseen attack to perform summersaults, landing on our two feet.

Our torches were still lit up, their flames almost barely snuffed out before coming back in full force. That allowed us to see the large draconic shape appear in our place. The creature's signature antennae told me what I was seeing, the same kind of dragon Camicazi felt she would like to become. "It's a Changewing!" said Camicazi. "My and I thought I was the only one who thought turning invisible was a great way to break into somewhere." Meatlug was barking something at the new dragon, but it did not respond. All it did was twist the key and remove it from the lock, making sure that the Gronckle's cage stayed shut. Albeit it had some difficulty doing that; dragon paws, or whatever they're called, are not the best at fine manipulation. Camicazi though obviously took offense to having something of hers being stolen. "Hey! Give that back, I stole those keys fair and square!" The Changewing's response was to lob an acid blast, by which the Bog Burglar dodged by hiding behind a set of crates.

With its attention mostly on Camicazi, I made my move at charged at the hostile dragon, only to realize that the dragon was not alone. A second Changewing dropped out of hiding and blasted me in the face with acid. I had no time to evade, no time to realize what had happened before it was already too late.

I stopped where I stood and howled in pain. I cup my hands over my face, instinctively hoping to protect it from further harm. I don't know how much was burned away, but it hurt all the same. I felt a force slammed into me. I could not tell what it was, but I was sure it was one of the Nadders, er Changewings. I fell hard onto the ground, still holding my face.

I heard Camicazi shout something, but it hurt too much to understand. Meatlug also gave cries for concern for me. I could not reply,

everything hurt too much. Other sounds were heard, shouts and cries, all incomprehensible yet I could hear them as though they were shouting right in my ears. My throat burned.

The shouting and noise only seemed to grow more intense with each moment, pain intensified as the acid ate through me.

I don't know what was happening around me anymore, everything was blurry and my head seemed to spin for miles. I felt sick, dazed. But I would have none of this. I wanted to fight my pain, my injury on my own terms. The dragon who did this to me had to pay. I was so angry, but I was helpless because of my pain; I am no use to anyone on the ground.

I knew I needed help, so I went looking for it the only way I could. Tyr was the god of glory and law, one of Odin's sons. I was not afraid, but I needed the will to fight despite my injuries and to repay these dragons for what they did to my face. "Tyr," I invoked in a whisper. "Tyr." I tried to find my axe, it landed right beside me. It might have been just another cheap replacement, but it was still my only weapon. My hands grasped onto something hard and wooden and reaching further, I felt cold metal bent into a familiar, comforting shape. I held it close.

I muttered Tyr's name again and again, hoping he would answer my pleas. Once I was sure he was listening, I stopped chanting his name, instead making my request, "Let me strike true." My hand shot up, responding to an urging I felt. Cold liquid fell upon my face.

I opened my eyes, the burning was mostly gone now. My vision was still blurry, but I could see the dark liquid coming from where the axe struck. I wiped my eyes, clearing my vision just a little more. I did not like the feeling of smooth scales I had when my hand glided over my eyes. The Changewings were both on top of me, Camicazi held her sword out, pointed at both of the opposing dragons. All of them were stunned, especially the Changewing I struck. "What are you?" I heard her say as she looked at me. The axe was imbedded in her underbelly and quite deeply. The dragon was either too stunned or in too much pain to move to retaliate. I took advantage of that. I pulled it free and struck the same spot a second time. The Changewing screamed in pain as she fell to the ground.

"No!" screamed the other Changewing, this one a male. He turned his attention to me, concerned for the safety for his fallen companion. That was all the opportunity Camicazi needed to land a devastating flourish. The Bog Burglar did some twirls and spins as she closed the distance, her dance heralding the attack. The blade hit deep near the male Changewing's neck. He fell, too, reduced to nothing but an immobile heap. More blood fell upon me, but the danger was now gone.

"Astrid!?" said Camicazi. I have no idea of how long I was incapacitated or what had happened in the interim, but I could see that Camicazi had taken some scratches and acid burns while I was down. There was also plenty of bleeding on her left arm, but she was already tearing some linens up to make some bandages and stop the bleeding. Overall, she was fine, but not uninjured.

"I'm fine" I said as I pushed myself up. I still felt a little dizzy, but I could still stand. The Bog Burglar's face turned pale

for some reason, I couldn't understand why.

"Are you sure about that?"

"I'm fine, Meatlug," I replied automatically.

"I'm not, too sure about that." And then, I realized Meatlug was still a dragon, still in her cage. The other dragons were still in their cages, all of them shocked and surprised, each giving cries equally of lament, shock, and disbelief, all of which I could understand them perfectly now. It is so strange suddenly knowing a language you have heard so many times before, but never listened to.

"Meatlug, what's going on?" I asked.

"You now understand and speak the tongue of my Kin," said the Gronckle.

I turned to Camicazi who had a look of both concern and confusion. "And here I was thinking I would have someone I could keep talking to. It's bad enough having to try to wait for Hiccup to finish writing, now I've got to wait a few minutes to know what you want, too."

I approached Meatlug, my balance correcting itself with every step I took. This, combined with must have been an utterly freakish appearance, was not going to go well with my parents. I am definitely starting to regret having made that bargain, now that the full price was about to start coming into effect. I don't think I'd want to look at my own reflection for a while. "Meatlug, what did those Changewings want? Why were they here?" I asked. Now that they were gone, I figure now that I thought about it, Meatlug was most likely warning us about them with her cries. I just never understood her, until now.

Camicazi, obviously disliking the fact she was not allowed to be in on the conversation, went looking for the keys. Apparently, she and the Changewings ended up making a mess of the whole place. The various boxes and barrels that held the dragon's feeding supplies were flattened. Acid was blasted on each of the walls, the stone melting.

Meatlug replied, "You mean those mad Kin?"

"Yeah."

"They wanted to set us free!" said the Gronckle. "To fight for them."

"You mean like with the Terror when, well, with Hiccup's kidnapping?" The Gronckle nodded their head. "Are they with the King?"

"No, I questioned them. They pretended to know of him, but they did not know him at all," said Meatlug. Which meant, that they were likely with the Outcasts.

"And we would have still fought for their King!" said a nearby Gronckle.

"You'd betray your King?" I asked.

A Nadder then spoke up, "It is better that than for us to rot in this prison, waiting to die! We saw what you did to the Squire, we desire to be free." The Nadder was glaring a bit at Meatlug. Well, it was obvious that he was paying attention back when we took Stormfly. I wonder if the Changewings learned that bit of trivia before theyâ€¦ well, ended up on the floor.

Meatlug added, "Which is why they wanted to fight, it was the only way."

I nodded, understanding. I know what it's like to be locked up in a cage. They had been here for Odin knows how long and were willing to aid complete strangers if it meant being liberated. On top of that, all of these dragons were the left behinds of Trader Al's kidnapping attempt on Hiccup; they had tasted a chance of freedom, but had it taken away from them. They were desperate to have another go. So I asked them, "Then, what if you did not have to fight?"

The dragons were stunned, I now had all of their attention. "What do you propose, Herdling?" said a nearby Gronckle.

"We'll set you free, but in exchange, I ask that you never take revenge on us, Herd." The dragons all began talking each other when they heard my words, each wondering if I was trustworthy or whether or not they should betray me.

Camicazi approached Meatlug's cage with the keys in her left hand. In her other, she had Meatlug's amulet. She both tossed them up in the air, juggling them giddily. "Okay, so Astrid, let's get Meatlug and get out of here!" She unlocked Meatlug's cage in the split second the necklace was in the air. With a deft motion of her hands she placed the necklace on the Gronckle. One moment, there was a dragon, the next there was a rather large girl.

"Tell her," I said, since I can't directly communicate to the Bog Burglar, without writing something. Meatlug stepped out of her cage and told her of my intentions.

The Bog Burglar's reply was a simple, "Astrid, why do you want to do this?"

"They want to escape and one way or another, they're going to get free," I said, Meatlug translated for me. "I might as well let them do it now when they could cause the least harm." Plus, if Alvin or anyone else decides that having the dragons would be an asset for whatever cause they want, it would be a good idea of denying that chance. I know this is technically treason, but this was the second time someone has thought liberating the dragons in the Kill Ring was a good idea. Besides, Camicazi and I could always blame it on the Changewings, lie about the dragons being released before we arrived and say we slew the ones responsible for breaking the dragons free. Granted, I might have to explain how dragons even know what keys are, but that'd be easier than letting all of Berk know the truth.

Camicazi just laughed, "Well, I guess I can tell my mum that I stole every dragon on Berkâ€¦" She opened the cages, in quick succession.

Each of them had the same lock, Camicazi did not have to spend so much trying to find the right key.

Once all of the cages were opened, we opened the gate and let them loose. They fled out the Arena like a herd of stampeding cattle, trampling the ground beneath them. They did not stop so much to give a mention of gratitude, each was far too willing to take their own freedom. Once the dragons had the chance, they took flight, looking for distant horizons. As per my request, none of them engaged in battle. I knew they would, dragons, apparently even the lowest, held their honor in high regard.

"Well, ain't that a sight?" muttered Camicazi. "Flying, almost makes me wish I could steal wings."

"You're interested in flying?" asked Meatlug. I had the same question, but the former Gronckle asked for me.

"Yeah, Toothless told me some stories about what flying is like about the rush you get whenever he made a dive, the fancy tricks like flying while laying on his back, all sorts of things," said the Bog Burglar. "I wonder if he misses it."

I wondered that, too. Though we all knew Toothless was really human, we also knew that he had spent his life as a dragon before. I might have still been mad at him, but at the same time, the acid might have made things worse if I did not take the potion. Flying under his own power was something he could never do as a human. Like the dragons in the Kill Ring, he was not free. He did not have the option to spread his wings, if he still had them. And like those dragons in cages, if he had the option to fly again, would he take it?

And if I had the option to fly, would I take it, too?

* * *

><p>This was not the first time I saw Berk burn before. The first time I did, I was partly responsible for setting it on fire. I saw the world differently then. Berk was just another fiefdom, a territory to be exploited. It was simply the duty of the Knighthood to Hunt there. Our orders were simple, quickly gather any food as needed and remove any obstacles in our way. If the beasts attack the peasants, ensure that the majority of them escape with as much fish or meat as possible. Back then, I blindly followed those orders, now my eyes opened.<p>

For the first time, I am beginning to understand the devastation dragons do to humans. When I was a fledgling, still being educated and told stories of noteworthy Kin, we were told of how glorious it was to set a Herd nest to the flame. How many times have I aspired to be like Flaming Tail, a Nightmare whose tail was constantly set ablaze? How long did I spend looking at bonfires, imagining myself triumphant amongst the spoils of a good Hunt and the burnt remains of Herd. Back then, I was eagerly knocking down towers, hoping that each fallen stone would give make up for my earlier failures. I congratulated myself for every I destroyed a stone spire, every shattered building. I delighted as I saw commoners pulling up strange containers filled to the brim with fish. I can't look at Berk the same way I did way back then; I did not want to see it burn to ash. It was my home, my nest.

I guess I should be glad that my brother was doing the walking for me, Fishlegs and I were still riding him. My gaze was set firmly in the direction of Berk. While most of the village was still standing, the fires kept creeping steadily. I just can't bear watching it, yet I still could not turn my head away.

"You okay, Toothless?" asked Fishlegs, snapping me from my trance.

I shook my head, and turned my gaze away, "Oh, uh, nothing," I said, almost automatically. My head almost snapped back to Berk, but I held it forward. No, I did not want to get sucked in again.

My brother were not convinced though; he knew me well enough. "It's about home, isn't it?"

I nodded, unable to really put up lying for more than just a sentence. "Yeah," I groaned. "I just can't help but feel a little helpless. I don't know what to do. How do you deal with something this?"

Hiccup turned his head toward me and said, "Well, according to the monthly calendar, we were overdue for it to rain fire, men not so much."

"Brother,"

Hiccup only shook his head, "This sort of thing happens all the time, bud. Everyone on Berk lived through fire before." Which made me feel even more guilty. Dragon Hunts happened all throughout the year on numerous islands. Berk was only one of them." Worse yet, half them were done my mother. How did she deal with setting her old home on fire? Hiccup continued, "But I'm here for you, bud. Don't worry, we'll live through this."

My brother's reassurance helped me regain my composure. It was like a burden was being lifted off my shoulders, I trusted him to live up to his promise. I patted my brother gently on the head, the only thing I thought to do. Licking my brother would be improper, humans did not do that. But where dragons used their mouths or tongues, humans used their hands. "Thanks, brother."

Soon afterwards, we arrived at an old rundown shack near by the base of the mountain. It was the same building as I remembered it from the dream Hiccup and I shared, but more rundown and overgrown. The building had fallen into disuse, but thankfully it was still standing.

I got off my brother, finally realizing the downside to that. Ow, my hips were sore. I never knew that sitting could ever be so painful. I began stretching my legs, trying to get the feeling back into them. I am so never riding my older brother like that ever again, it is just way too painful and way too embarrassing. Fishlegs though did not seem to have it as bad as me, he just walked up to the front door and opened it. I guess he must have had the key or there was no lock.

Fishlegs and I walked in first. "I see Old Wrinkly's place is as charming as ever," said the blonde boy. I had to agree. It was so dark inside, I was half expecting the shadows to get up and eat me.

Even the light of my lamp was not enough to see more than a foot away. I forgot to restock on oil and my it was just barely on its last droplets. I wasn't shivering. Neither was Fishlegs. We were brave, honest.

Hiccup, walked in last. The floorboards creaked at his ever foot step. "Just a moment," he growled. "I think we still have some spare wood." He had the advantage of being able to see in low light conditions, so Fishlegs and I stayed still while he walked in the dark room. Hiccup then breathed out a small puff of fire, lighting the old shack to more comfortable levels.

My grandfather's place was rather sparse, the majority of the decorations and knickknacks were moved away since he had left Berk. The only things that I could see were an empty bookshelf, a table, and the central fireplace I remembered him trying to divine Hiccup's future. There was nothing else, _absolutely nothing. _

Hiccup laid on his side by the fire he created. "Come on," he gestured and I complied. I took my usual place by my elder's size; this was significantly less embarrassing than having to ride him.

Fishlegs did the same, not really understanding the command, but, but doing it anyways. Then, my brother put his wings over us both, completely engulfing me. My brother really can't help himself from pointing out how small I was.

"Uh, thanks," said the larger boy, sighing. "I hope Meatlug is okay out there."

"Yeah, I hope Astrid's fine," said my brother. I had to translate for him.

"Iâ€¦ wish I could help dad," I said. I wanted to be out there, in Berk, fighting. But I was just a little boy living in a world ruled by giants. I was so small; I would only get in the way of the _real _combatants. I could maybe take my crossbow out and take some shots at Outcasts, but then I'd just make myself a big, er, small, target. Against dragons, I might end up getting myself burned to death by accident.

If I was a dragon, a Night Fury, one of the greatest dragons the world had ever known, maybe I could make a difference. My brother, though he was a dragon, still did not have the practice or experience to use all of those abilities to their full potential. He had the power, but I had the skill. I lived my whole life as a Night Fury, I knew the ins and outs by heart. If I had the chance, I would put that power to good use in saving Berk. Maybeâ€¦ that's what it would take for me to go back.

All I could do now was look at the fire.

And then, I could hear a faint cracking, coming from below me. Hiccup felt it, too, and he gave me a perplexed look. At that point, we both realized the wood we were on laying was starting on come apart. Fishlegs, noticing the danger leapt out of the way, a feat you'd think a guy his size might have trouble doing; fear motivates, I guess. But as for my brother and I, we were too late. We fell, the wood shattering in an instant.

"I got you!" yelled my brother, grasping me in his forelegs. We both landed with a heavy thud, my brother taking most of the fall for me. I got off of my brother, scrubbing the dirt from my eyes and clothing.

"Are you guys alright?" yelled Fishlegs.

My brother roared a response, "We're fine!" Fishlegs at least seemed to be able to understand him. I guess even if you don't know the language automatically, you can learn how to understand a dragon's calls.

Other than the fact we were in some sort of room, I did not know where we were. It was somewhat dark, but the fire from the room above gave enough visibility for me to see. "Hiccup, where are we?"

"I don't know," he replied. "But I think I can get us some light though." My brother then breathed out a small gout of flame, lighting a torch on a nearby wall. He did this again, and again, until all of the torches in the room were lit. "There, now you could actually see," said my brother.

"Thanks," I replied. The first things I noticed that there was a pillar of stone directly under where the fireplace was on the floor above, most likely to prevent the fire from falling down below. I also found a staircase leading upstairs, which caught my attention. "Wait here," I said, my brother nodding in agreement.

I followed the stairway upwards, finding that it led to directly behind the bookshelf on the first floor. I was amazed when I realized that this secret place was completely hidden and the only reasons my brother and I found it was because of random luck. Fishlegs and I moved it, an easier task to do when there are no books to add more weight.

We both headed back downstairs, curious to see what was below. Well, I did anyways. My brother had to drag Fishlegs before he went below. This room was made of stone, in contrast to the completely wooden room where we came from; it was easily bigger than the room above. There was a few interesting sites. Such as, a large stone table surrounded by candles and inscribed with unfamiliar runes. There was a writing desk, one which had a few books and jars of ink. A few chests were situated near the desk. On the nearby walls were a collection of various items of some sort, a spear, a staff, a sword, a shield and a black cloak.

Oh, and everything was also covered in a thick coating of dust; whatever this place was, it must have been sealed away for years, probably ever since my grandfather left Berk.

"Wow," was all Fishlegs had to say. "And I used to think Old Wrinkly was really lame. He wasn't all that good at Soothsaying."

My brother nodded, apparently, he was of the same opinion. I did not comment, I hardly knew my grandfather. All I knew of him were the things Hiccup had said and this weird collection of items. One item in particular had caught my attention, I approached the black cloak, for a reason I could not quite understand. I was drawn to it for some reason I could

"Toothless?" questioned my brother as he approached. "What is that?"

"Some sort of cloak."

The cloak was made of cloth, but it was woven in such a way that it almost appeared to have an almost scalelike pattern going through it. As an added bonus, the hood somewhat resembled a dragon's, with extra pieces of cloth worked to look like ears or fins. Albeit with some artistic license being taken, I could not help being reminded of a Night Fury when I looked at it. All that was missing would have been an extension to represent the two finned tail and some fake wings.

There was a small plaque on the wall nearby, reading:

A gift to my grandson. I know you'll like it.

O.W.

Most likely, he was referring to Hiccup, but why would he give him a cloak that resembled a Night Fury? He probably thought it was a means of encouragement. Or it could have been something or... unusual. I once heard from Fishlegs that sometimes, people wore garments fashioned from a bear and still resembling one to channel the power the bear had in life. Maybe the same principal applied, except using cloth instead of hide. Still... I wanted to put it on, as silly as that was. "Hey, Hiccup, mind if I try this on? Grandpa says it's for you, but, wellâ€¦"

My brother nodded. "Go ahead, not like I could use it anyways."

I grinned in response. One of the perks I learned of being the little brother was that I got the hand-me-downs and there was no shame in the matter. I wasn't loaning the items, so much as I was inheriting them when they were useless for their original owners. Still, I guess it was the closest I could ever get to being what I was again.

I took the cloak off the wall and put it on back. I tied it the string that fastened the garment around my neck, making sure that it would not fall by accident.

It was then I suddenly became aware that this cloak was even less ordinary than I originally thought it was. There was an odd sensation running through my body, like I was being filled with some sort of energy. I could my hand being urged to put the hood over my head. I did so, unaware of what was going to happen.

"Toothless!" Hiccup said. I fell to my knees. The power that was following through me was overwhelming.

"I'm fineâ€¦" I managed to cough out, my voice start to sound deeper, louder than it was before. My brother obviously did not believe me. I did not know what was happening, yet I somehow knew_, _as much as a contradiction as that was. My head started spinning and body felt like it was on fire. I was aware of the cloth-like scales as they stopped stopped being cloth-like, just scales. Those very scales wrapped themselves around my body, practically fusing with my flesh. The hood, in particular, covered my face entirely, engulfing it until

it _was my face._ I grew in size, a set of wings and a tail formed themselves from the scales. It hurt, all of it hurt.

Fishlegs backed away, but my brother still held tightly as I completed my change.

Though I did not see myself, I was aware of each and every part of my body as it was being twisted twisted and warped. I was transforming, not unlike the day I first became what I really was.

And then it stopped. I was no longer completely aware of what parts of my body were changing and how, because there were no more changing to be done. Every odd sensation of strange energies was gone, replaced by an old and familiar power I had never felt in a long time. I could feel the warmth in my inside, the power of my Breath once again in my chest. I flexed my wings, feeling their familiar presence as though I was feeling for an old friend. In excitement, I wagged my tail, bringing it into view. It responded to my desires perfectly. Oh, how I missed my own tail. I grasped it in my hand, no, paws dragons, Kin, did not have hands. They were clumsier, inflexible compared to hands, but they had so much power behind them.

I was a Night Fury again. As far as I could tell, every fiber of my being was once again that of a dragon's. I even had the retractable teeth.

"Toothless!" said my brother as he faced me. Oddly enough, he was still bigger than me. At best, a foot was what separated us. Sometimes, I wonder if it was right for him to be labeled the runt of the litter.

"Hiccup!" Or rather I called him by the closest approximation of his name. I gasped. I suddenly felt more excited than I had ever been in months. We were both dragons, both speaking the same language. I could show him how to fly now, and maybe breathe fire and maybe! And then it dawned on me what I should use my newly returned power for. I grinned.

"Woah!" muttered Fishlegs. He was hiding behind the stone pillar. "I guess that cloak is one really good costume," he pointed out.

Hiccup nodded as he approached, "Uh Toothless, are you feeling okay?"

"Definitely," I replied. "Hiccup, I think we should go defend Berk now."

"Toothless, we can't do that," replied my brother.

"Berk needs its own dragons. And now there's two of us," I said as I made my way toward the stairs. "We could make a difference," I argued.

Brother denied me by getting in my way. "Toothless, it's dangerous. We have to stay here where it's safe.

"I could defend myself. In fact, we could probably best several Kin on our own," I roared. We had the power now. We had to use it.

"I can'tâ€¦" started my brother. He was still not budging.

I huffed. So that's how it was? My brother thinks that I should hide, when I had the power to fight back. Well, I guess I had no choice. I did not need to take the stairs, not at all. I jumped upwards, my paws grabbing a hold of the floorboards above. I used the stone pillar nearby to provide me some traction; thankfully, it covered in runes and sigils, so I could climb it. Slowly, I was able to climb upwards, away from my brother.

"Toothless!" shouted by brother as he tried to pull me down. Unfortunately for him, I was much better at using my tail and I slapped him, I lifted my now much heavier body from out of that pit. Fortunately, the wood did not collapse on me again.

I ran out the door and extended my wings.

I flapped them a bit, bringing my body high enough so that the wind could start carrying me. It had been so long since I felt the rush of air beneath my wings, I had almost forgotten what it was like. I was free from my bounds, no more having to walk everywhere, obeying things like roads or having to adjust my travel plans based on geography. All I needed to guide me was the wind and the stars.

Maybe I was being foolish when I thought I could ever give up something like flying.

Alvin and his Outcasts won't know what hit them. I'll make them pay for having think they could imprison me. And then I'll show those pitiful Kin the consequences of burning down my nest.

* * *

><p>So, for the first time, main characters are ending the lives of people who had dialogue. This is probably the most darkness I have done in a while.

Apparently, Thor and I did not realize normal locks are impractical for holding dragons/not 100% period accurate. For the purposes of this story, we'll be ignoring the technicality because it is so minor. At least until we do a major overhaul of the story.

You knowâ€¦ it's really endearing to have older brother Hiccup. I hope I do this well.

22. Chapter 22

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

To anyone who made a guess that the dragons under Alvin's control are the results of the Outcasts finding a way to mass produce Hiccup's potion, I would like to say, you are all wrong.

Thanks to Thorborn for handling Alvin's accent. I cannot do accents for the life of me.

**Enjoy and please review. **

* * *

><p>With Meatlug and Camicazi following behind me, I decided that now would be a good time to get the twins.<p>

"Loose your arrows!" shouted a man. At his call, a dozen men let go of their grips, sending a wave of burning projectiles in against a horde of dragons. Dragons might have had impossibly flame resistant scales, but those scales did not protect them all that well from arrows. Riddle dragon with enough arrows or hit something vital and it goes down.

The archers and marksmen readied their arrows again, waiting for another chance to strike. Younger boys ran back and forth from the nearby armory, equipping their fathers and brothers if need be. Berk, and Vikings in general, may have preferred blades and bludgeons, but we were no slouches at shooting things out of the sky.

My father was among them, commanding our neighbors in the defense. I promptly turned around and walked away, I did not want him or anyone else to see me. I couldn't even _speak _to him. Good thing I did not need to go through there. I could afford another way.

The problem, the twins, if they stayed home, were in the parts of Berk that were suffering some of the worst of the dragon attacks. Thankfully, the Outcasts were not as close, or else it would have been worse. I just needed to plan a route that protected us from most of the flames. Now the direct route was on fire, so maybe if we took the way by the side ally and thenâ€|

"Eep!" squeaked Meatlug as she ducked her head underneath a chairâ€| which her shoulders raised into the air by a good foot or so. I turned and looked up, and saw that a few stray Gronckles, one of the dragons with the least speed and agility fall plumpeting to earth. Gronckle hides were tough no doubt, but even toughness had its limits.

"It's okay," I said. "That's not going to happen. No one is going to shoot you. You're one of us now, Meatlugâ€|" Meatlug opened her eyes, looking at me, hopefully. Strange, how easy it was to call her that, even though she was a dragon. Things were so much simpler when it was just people versus dragons. Now it was dragons on our side, dragons on the Outcast's, and the dragons on their own side; that's dragons on two different sides they were in previously.

"Aye! And if they so much as thought about it, why, I'll hit them so hard, they won't notice me burgling their their whole kits," added Camicazi. She probably got enough of Meatlug's side of the conversation to guess at what I would be saying.

"Alrightâ€|" said Meatlug as she stood up and put the chair back into position. She was still hesitant, but she seemed willing to follow.

"Just, don't spent too much time looking at the sky," I said. Now that I thought about it, Meatlug out of all of us had reason to fear the archers. She was after all in their sights at one point. As a Squire, it was her job to fight off and defend as much of the dragons that spent their time pillaging. That likely meant fighting or

running some sort of interference. I don't know what her exact role was, but it was not too hard for me to imagine she might have almost been downed above Berk. Maybe, if one stray shot landed its mark, she might have been incarcerated. Or worse.

Maybe she might have ended up as the warm up for dragon training class, as Gronckles were the preferred choice for 'Lesson One'. Maybe I would have spent an attempt or two trying to kill her to win over the crowd, gain a little bit of prestige to add to my belt before I fought the Nightmare and cleared my Clan's name. Maybe I would have.

I shook my head. Maybe it was not a good idea to think about that kind of things.

I walked with purpose down my desired direction, leading my friends, Meatlug included. The road I choose was as safe as it could be in a village that was burning every other block. Mostly, we just kept moving, not stopping for anything; the dragons overhead set fire to Berk hapzardly, leaving plenty of room to breathe while at the same time overcommitting in the strangest of places. Like, was it really necessary to bombard the _entirety_ of a _river_ on fire? I guess that meant that the overall damage was going to be typical of a dragon attack, probably even less than normal; there were not that many dragons.

After avoiding some near misses, we arrived at the twins houseâ€| which was surprisingly intact and undisturbed. By some stroke of luck that can only be attributed to the machinations of _Loki_, _the dragons, Outcasts, and whatever forces Berk had completely avoided everywhere within a fifty foot radius from the home. I was slightly dumb founded by that. Why was it that the twin's home was completely unharmed when the rest of Berk was suffering?

My friends and I approached the door. I knocked.

I heard the sound of a heavy thump and a series of lout retorts and complains. Footsteps rapidly approached the door, cumulating with a loud thud as a heavy force slammed on the door. And then the door knob twitched and the door opened creakily.

"Oh, hey Astrid! You look good!" cheered Ruffnut, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact she was covered in bruises and had a bloodshot eye. She also did not seem to mind the fact that my face became unnatural. "And you, too, Camicazi."

Belch, or was it Barf? I could never tell them apart before, but at least now theirâ€| unique patterns of injuries provided a means of separating the two. Either way, one of the two halves of the Zippleback stated, "And, greetingsâ€|"

"â€|Meatlug," completed the other.

"We take it you're here to celebrate the return of our yak!" said Tuffnut, also covered in bruises and having a bloodshot eye. "Which is good because it was starting to get boring."

The Zippleback pair nodded in agreement.

"We've been wrestling each other for the past five hours," said

Ruffnut.

"Maybe it's time for a change of pace," added Tuffnut. The boy then took a whiff of the outside air and declared, "Hey is something burning?"

Meatlug, Camicazi, and I just stood dumb founded, all of us having the same expressions on our faces, the same thoughts running through our heads. They did not know. Berk gets attacked by dragons and Outcasts, and the twins and the Zippleback were completely oblivious to it. The four of them were complaining about their wrestling not being _exciting _enough, right in the middle of a combat zone.

Better yet, their house and the area around it was practically untouched and undisturbed until me and my friends came around. They might have gone through the whole night, not even realizing there was a fight until they went to go get breakfast or buy firewood.

I could not believe it; there had to have been a divine power working behind the scenes. I refuse to believe this happened because of some incredible set of circumstances, this just did not make sense. and this came from the girl who is part dragon on her face and could only speak to dragons.

I said nothing, letting Camicazi and Meatlug doing the talking for me. I would probably need a few more minutes to pick up my jaw from the floor anyways. Besides, the twins wouldn't understand a word I said, even if I still spoke Norse.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all," said Camicazi, pushing the bruised teenagers into the house. Meatlug and I gave her a hand, although both of us gave questioning looks to the Bo Burglar. I guess if the twins were safe in their own home, then there was no need for them to leave it and for us at the same time. I was not scared dying or anything, but I don't want anyone else to see me like this. The four teenagers protested and tried to push their way out, but with the strength I now had and with Meatlug behind me, things were decidedly in our favor. We heaved the twins inside, throwing them to the floor. Camicazi immediately slammed the door and locked it when had the chance.

"Hey what was that for?" yelled Tuffnut.

"Yeah, you can't keep us in our own home!" said Ruff.

"It is for your own good," said Meatlug. Maybe she did not see the point of not telling them or wanted to be honest.

Camicazi ran with it. "Yeah, the outside is totally boring, you'd pretty much die of boredom the moment you'd set foot outside."

"That's impossible," said the one I assumed was Belch.

Barf added, "No one dies of boredom." Well, they had _slightly _more sense than the twins, I'll give them that. Still, most sane people would not be anywhere within five feet of the twins, let alone _live_ with them for about a week.

"Yes, you can," countered Tuffnut. "Ruffnut did that last week."

"No, I didn't," said the girl.

"Of course, you did."

"If I died, then why am I here?" Points to Ruffnut that being a girl made her inherently smarter than her twin.

"I don't know, maybe you're some kind of ghost," shrugged the male twin.

And then, the twins promptly started their regularly scheduled brawl. Most likely, they completely forgot they were trapped in their own house against their will. Barf and Belch watched for a moment before diving in themselves. The whole thing devolved from a free-for-all, a tag team fight, a three-on-one boys versus girl, another tag team fight with different teams, and finally another free-for-all in the span of about _five minutes._ Meatlug, Camicazi, and I could only stand to watch the whole thing. I had to hand it to Barf and Belch, not many people can keep up with those twoâ€|

"Do they always do this?" asked Camicazi. I only nodded. She whistled and muttered, "Maybe I should give them back that skullâ€|"

The fight lasted for a solid thirty minutes before it got boring to watch. Sure, it was exciting for the first few reversals or changes in the way it was held, but overall, neither side, or sides, ended up making any significant progress towards victory. Ruffnut, Tuffnut, Barf and Belch were still going at it with all they got, but now, that fight was just not as appealing to watch as it once was. I guess if you watched conflict for long enough, watching the same battle play out over and over again, anyone would get bored of it. As far as I could tell, the only way to end the conflict now was to involve some sort of outside force or wait until they all fatigued themselves.

But before I stepped in and made that fight my own, a blast of fire hit the front door. The door took a beating, but it was not catching on fire. Only a small portion was let through, but it was still enough to make me feel uneasy. I guess it was only a matter of time before dragons showed up.

Meatlug backed away from the door first. "That's Nightmare Breath," she said. The Gronckle in disguise ran away the door was hit by a series of heavy thumps. Then, a glowing spot appeared in the center of the door frame. It slowly got bigger by the moment. Once the dot grew large enough, the wood being heated by the glowing dot was starting to burn over. At that point, the glowing spot started to move up and down, expanding the area of what parts of the door were going to be burned away. "And there's also a Nadder!" How she was able to tell from here, I would never know, but I guess being a dragon for all of her life gave her an advantage.

I kept calm and I approached to door. I stood by the frame, just clear of the door, axe in hand. The moment the door was breached, I would strike a furious blow against my enemy.

"Someone's trying to break into the house!" said Tuffnut.

"Well duh," said his sister. "This is perfect!"

"Should we go getâ€|" said one of the Zippleback halves.

"â€|the secret weapon?" completed his other half.

"Of course!" the twins said. Then the four of them ran off to some other section of the house.

"Secret weapon?" Camicazi asked me, even though I could not speak to her anymore.

I only shrugged, causing the Bog Burglar to frown. Whatever weapon the twins were willing to use on home intruding dragons just might save us. We were in a wooden house, AKA something flamable. The dragons might not have been setting the house on fire just yet, but we can't assume they won't do that later on. If the dragons were smart and knew that we were here, they could just simply set the house on fire and trap us inside. Which begged the question, why were they not doing that? I know dragons are smart as any human, Meatlug was proof of that.

The line burnt through the door had grown large enough to almost cut the door in half, height-wise. And then the dragon burning through the door delivered a kick using its powerful legs, causing the destroyed pieces to fall uselessly on the floor. I almost swung my axe at the Nadder as it walked through, but I recognized the creature.

Meatlug beat me to it, "Nadder?" What are you doing here?"

The Nadder, or if we were going to go by the name Camicazi and I jokingly gave, Stormfly, walked into the building. Her scales were a bit muddied and bloodied from what can only have been combat, but I recognized it as her. "I should ask you all the same," said Stormfly. "I am here looking for those an ally of mine requires."

"Ally?" I said.

"Astrid?" I heard someone familiar say.

"Snotlout?" I replied. Snotlout, followed by the head of a vaguely familiar Nightmare, entered the house. A worried look dawned on his face as he saw me, most likely catching a glimpse of what had become of me. "Astrid, what happened to you?" said the boy.

"I should ask you the same thingâ€|" I replied, not really caring if he understood or not. I was not the one who had the broken remains of a shield stuck in an arm.

"And you talk like one of the dragons," said the boy. "That'sâ€|bad."

Oh, he had no idea. Still, I was surprised he was able to understand meâ€|.of all the people on Berk, it just _had _to be _him. _"What are you doing here anyways? And why do you haveâ€| them following you?"

"Oh, uh, just looking for the twins, I had no idea you'd show up

hereâ€¦ And as for the dragons, well, one of them, owes me the other just wants to fightâ€¦" I nodded, understanding Snotlout's little explanation. "What happened to your face? And your throat?"

"Acid..."

"Release the secret weapon!" I heard some voices yell.

And in a turn of events that I should have expected, four teenagers came barreling toward us, a strange device on wheels behind them. It was one of Hiccup's old devices, that automatic bolas launcher Hiccup thought would help him shoot down Toothless. But didn't it get destroyed before we went to Beserker Island? Did the twins rebuild it? That ideaâ€¦ was scarier than it should have.

With flick of the lever, a mounted crossbow-like device popped from underneath the wooden casing. It certainly looked like it was in working order. Who would have ever thought that the twins were capable of such things? Maybe they _should _be encouraged to keep punching each other instead of working with woodâ€¦ it'd be safer for everyone.

"Fire!" yelled Tuffnut as he grabbed hold of the firing apparatus.

"Uh, guys," Camicazi interrupted. "You do know these guys are friends of ours, right?"

"Fire, anyways!" said Ruffnut.

And Tuffnut pulled the trigger of the deviceâ€¦ and it plenty fell apart. The device exploded into a shower of wreckage.

"Whoopsâ€¦" muttered Tuffnut, earning a slap from his sister. "Ow!"

I gave a sigh of relief; the twins were _not _capable of rebuilding a complicated mechanical device. One bizzare and unexplained feat of the twins was more than I could take in a day. Camicazi broke into a fit of giggles at the sight. Soon afterward I started chuckling all laughed for a moment, before things settled down again.

We took advantage of the fact this place was safe from Outcasts and dragons to recover from our injuries earlier in the night. I helped Shootout out by pulling the shield parts off of his arm; he cried out while I was doing it. His arm started to get ratherâ€¦ slimmer as it grewâ€¦ fins, for lack of a better term. It was definitely changing into something that wasâ€¦ not an arm. For someone who liked to say he was big and tough, he was really a big baby. Camicazi had to change the bandages on her injured arm, swapping out for fresher linensâ€¦ and dislocating the arm to set it into a position for it to heal better. She did not cry.

The others were mostly off doing their own thing, Meatlug and Stormfly were discussing over what happened since the two had last met. The twins and the Zippleback pair were in a staring contest this time. How they managed to have a four-way staring contest is something that boggled the mind.

Of course, that was not the end of things tonight. Right over our heads, I heard very familiar call, one I had not heard in a long while. Though it was a sound a dragon made, it was not a phrase or a saying, so much as it was just a very general statement of being present.

The twins were the first to step outside the house, I was second, or third. The two of them ogled their eyes at the sight of Berk burning, well, so much for trying to keep things secret from them. Most of the others were right behind me. All of us were curious to see what was happening overhead. While there were still plenty of dragons overhead, I could faintly make out the silhouette of one of them as it charged into a wayward flock. It blasted them with a powerful, seemingly invisible blast, one that I had only seen used against towers and a few other important structures.

A Night Fury was fighting the other dragons, flying circles around them and pummeling them with blasts of explosive energies. "Is that Hiccup?" I asked. It couldn't be him, though. Hiccup was still just gliding and was nowhere near making those building toppling blasts everyone on Berk was afraid of.

"I don't think so," said Meatlug. "I think it'sâ€¦ the Night Fury, I mean, Toothless."

"Toothless?" I responded. That can't be right. If that was Toothless, how did he become a dragon again? Did he take the potion and set himself on fire or something?

Meatlug nodded. Camicazi whistled, "Well, he's definitely proving how much better he is at being a dragon than the one working for the Outcasts." I nodded. Toothless flew circlers around the disorganized flocks, evading their shots and returning vicious blows. But he was alone, fighting against a small flock of dragons. No matter how good a single warrior was, numbers can still overwhelm him. As much I disliked the fact I wasâ€¦ changing because of his mistake, that still did not mean that he had to die for it.

The Nadder turned to Snotlout, who was looking rather upset. "Iâ€¦ appreciate the help you have been in offering a fight against theseâ€¦ Outcasts. Now that you have found the ones you sought, I think it is time for us to part ways." said Stormfly. Then she took off and went towards Toothless, just before Snotlout could commen. He and the Nightmare were left in a cloud of dust and confusion.

"Oh, hey, you should go join in, too!" said Tuffnut, as he took Barf's amulet.

Belch had his stolen by Ruffnut. "Yeah, it'll be great."

Within moments, the Zippleback emerged where the two boys stood. While both heads looked clearly annoyed by the whole affair, they flew off after a moment of cheers from the twins.

Camicazi and I looked at Meatlug, still human, her feet planted into the ground. "So, why don't you go?" asked the Bog Burglar.

"Iâ€¦ don't think that would be good," replied the Gronckle. "Besides it's dangerous, what with all the archers and marksmen ready to shoot me downâ€¦"

I nodded, as that was reasonable. One wrong move and she might end up getting an arrow some place it'd hurt. The others were either unknowing or uncaring of the danger ahead, but Meatlug was definitely the one who considered these things more seriously than the others. I just did not think that was the only reason. "Then stay next to Toothless. Most everyone will probably think he's Hiccup and I'm pretty sure no one wants to be so much as _accused _of trying to point an arrow at him." Chief Stoick, not so long ago, broke a man's arm for raising his sword against the Night Fury. No one, except someone who was crazy, would aim anywhere in his direction. Besides, there were no signs of Night Furies amongst Alvin's forces.

"Alright maybe I should help out," muttered Meatlug, taking her amulet off, returning to her true form. "I think Toothless might need a hand. I took the amulet from her as she took off.

I turned away, only to find Snotlout looking at me, his jaw dropped. Right, I forgot we never bothered to inform him. Camicazi did so, "Yeah, they're all dragons and use magical amulets to turn human."

"They're so lucky wish I had an amulet," muttered Snotlout. Definitely, an amulet to become wholly human would have been so much better than slowly changing like I was.

I held the amulet in my hand, curious as to how they worked. I wonder if it would work on me, maybe it would reverse my changes? Or maybe it might be able to turn me human after I became wholly dragon? Although, I think I'll ask Meatlug if I can try it out once gets back.

I still did not even know what kind of dragon I was becoming, I just hope it had arms...

I turned my attention skyward, watching the battle in the sky unfold. Well, at least Toothless was not going to be alone anymore. He had friends, people he knew at his back. I found it oddly amusing to watch dragons fighting others dragons, almost like I was watching a battle between Viking warriors. Stormfly in particular was showing us what made Nadders so deadly.

Maybe it was time I helped out against the human enemies. Yeah, I think it was time now. I've rested up. Meanwhile, the I felt the Nightmare was sniffing at the object I held in my hand.

* * *

><p>I missed flying, I really did. For the first time in ages, I flew with my wings. I almost never thought I would feel, never use them again. I obeyed no master save myself and the wind. My desires let me decide what I could and could not do. With my beat of my wings, I flexed them inward, tightening my lift, increasing my speed almost twofold. Sensations I had never felt for months returned to me, so alien, yet so familiar. Oh, how missed the rush, the thrill of going as fast as my body could take me. It was so exhilarating to feel my blood rushing to my legs, all four of them. Oh, if only my brother knew how to fly, then I would finally have someone who could match me but now, I had a job to do, a job not meant for a weakling of a

boy.<p>

I kept my speed high as I approached the outskirts of Berk. My black scales might have helped me blend in with the night sky, it was not a perfect camouflage. People were going to notice me, especially if I was going slow or low enough. I just only hope my Tribe realize I was one of them! Were really my, no, I can't focus on things like that right now, I had to keep going.

With my speed going as fast as it was and with my altitude above the attacking dragons, I was able to oversee the majority of Berk in an instant without them even noticing. On top of that, my sight gave me the power to see the area as if it was day time. Immediately, it became clear to me that the Outcasts and their dragons had covered somewhere under a fourth of Berk under fire and wreckage and even then it still felt like they were being less effective than they could be.. At the end of the day, despite how many dragons or Outcast there were, there were still way more able bodied villagers willing to defend their homes and numbers mattered. It was for this very reason why the Flights required truly vast numbers of conscripts to provide mass to those forces. All of it was simply to overwhelm the defenses of any Viking settlement, making it more difficult to defend. The Knights were simply there to make sure any defenses remained in disarray.

The number of dragons fielded were nowhere near the numbers involved in a typical hunt. On top of that, they were all being horrendous flies. Sure, I was nowhere near my peak, after having spent months unable to practice, but these dragons took it to a whole different level. They were all so sloppy, performing turns in awkward fashions and forgetting how to steer themselves properly. Worst of all, they were not even performing the simplest of formation flying, instead acting out as a disorganized mess, where only seldomly did they coordinate their efforts. Sometimes they even crashed into each other due to sheer negligence. It was almost as if I was looking at a force made entirely of beginners! Alvin, what kind of Flight did he get to support him?

Which made me wonder why Alvin bothered to make this attack in the first place. What goal could he possibly have that involves such an incompetent Flight?

I just shook my head. It did not matter why they were, those dragons had to go. These dragons were not my Kin. Their flying skills might have been questionable at best, but their Breath was just as effective as any Kin's. I had to put a stop to it.

I found an opportunity nearby. A small group of dragons, maybe around twelve of them, had broken off from the main fighting groups.

Now was my time to strike; I had no time to waste. I dropped altitude, leveling myself with that group. They still had not even begun to notice me as I began to circle near them. Once I found the right place to strike, I began building my Breath and charged.

The dragons did not see me coming.

I dived through the group, causing the startled dragons to shriek away in confusion and discord; one of them was too slow. I slammed my body right into a Nadder and then blasted it with my Breath, sending

it toppling to the ground. Dragons might be flame proof under most circumstances, but they were not immune to the sheer force of my blasts. It did not matter if my Breath consisted of fire or not, the sheer shock of the explosion was still effective against dragons, especially when flying. Being set alight was not dangerous to dragons, being knocked out by explosive force was.

The others retaliated to avenge their fallen comrade, but I was faster than them all. "Too slow!" I taunted as I dove straight to the ground. Three of them, most of them Nadders tried to chase after me, just as planned. Nadders were faster than most other dragons, despite being among the most common Breeds, they had a respectable amount of speed.

Unfortunately for them I planned for that. I opened my wings up, breaking the speed of my descent. The Nadders kept going forward and blazed past me; they only realized what I had just done a critical second later. They opened their wings to break their speed, but it was too late for them. Nadders had smaller wings. They crashed into a house. I chuckled to myself, it was a job well done.

Four down, eight to go, but now that the element of surprise was lost. While I had tricked the Nadders in the dive, the other dragons were either too slow or too smart to be defeated in the same manner. I was tackled by a pair of Gronckles who slammed me into each other like they were playing catch. I broke free by launching a blast at one of them. It missed but I was able to make my escape.

A Nightmare dove right in front of me and blasted a gout of flame I only barely managed to evade.

Eight on one were not good odds, but I felt that I had way more experience and fighting capability than all of them put together; I would defeat them. I just needed to set things up.

I flew, they gave chase. The other dragons all tried to hit me with their Breath, but I kept my distance and evaded their shots. Hopefully, if I kept it up long enough they'd reach their limits before they needed time to recover; that'd be the perfect opportunity to strike.

They all missed, but fire was the least of my concerns. One of the remaining Nadders, focused on trying to outfly me rather than trying to shoot me down. Every time I evaded a blast of fire, the Nadder used that opportunity to close the gap between me and it; I only realized this too late.

The Nadder dived into me with such force that I was sent tumbling downward.

Now this was bad; I did not have control of my wings and the dragons were moving in for the kill. I was an easy target and there was just not enough time for me to right myself before they finished me off. I knew that unless I got really lucky, I would be finished.

It turned out, I was lucky tonight. From out of nowhere, a Nadder that I had not seen in a week came darting somewhere underneath me and hit the opposing dragons with a flurry of her poisonous spines. They evaded her shots, buying me the time I needed to correct myself. I opened my wings and stabilized my descent, returning myself to

normal flight. "Are you alright, Night Fury?" asked the Nadder as we flew off side by side. The other dragons were also backing away for now, but who knew how long would that last?

"Yesâ€¦" I stuttered. Why was _she _here of all places and times? Moreover, why was she _saving me?_ Last I checked, she was upset I was the reason she ended up in a cage. Did she want to kill me off, herself, and would only accept it if she had an honorable duel? I just shook my head, I'll deal with that problem later. "My name is Toothless, you knowâ€¦"

The Nadder just shook her head. "You and everyone else seem to really like those names the Herd gave youâ€¦ Even they thought to name meâ€¦" Now that was surprising, Camicazi must have decided to name her on a whim.

"Like what?"

"One of the blonde furred ones thought to name me the Stormfly," she said dryly.

"Stormfly is a good name for you," I found myself speaking. Andâ€¦ I think it was a name I could continue calling her by. Besides, it was easier to give her a name than to think of her as ordinary Nadder.

"Maybe, it is a name fitting for Kinâ€¦" said Stormfly before diving downwards to avoid a fireball from a Gronckle. The fight resumed. "We may have to discuss that a latter time.

This time, the other dragons were launching the offensive to start things of, but Stormfly and I were faster. We evaded their blows, splitting off into different directions and curving our flight paths toward the dragon. Our actions were coordinated and swift. From both sides, we launched a volley against our opponents, knocking out two dragons and just barely without taking a hit ourselves.

The remaining six were preparing to chase us, but they did not get the chance. Strange, greenish tinted clouds surrounded before that could happen. For a moment those dragons and I shared some confusion as a cloud of noxious gas formed around them, obscuring their vision. It was only when I saw a Zippleback, approach that I realized what happened. Barf and Belch, returned to their true form, approached me and Stormfly. "What you doing here?" I asked. Shouldn't these two be with the twins, celebrating with a stuffed yak.

"Just having some fun," said Belch, just before he lit a spark and set the other part ablaze. Most of the dragons did not realize the danger inherent in the gas cloud and got caught up in the explosion. Like my Breath, the detonation of a Zippleback cloud was surprisingly very effective against other Kin.

Barf laughed, coughing up a small cloud of gas with approval. At least now I could tell the two apart. Belch was the head that could light sparks, while Barf was the one that breathed gas. It was so much easier than having to pay attention to two, perfectly exact twins.

The fiery cloud lasted for only a moment before dissipating. Two dragons, Gronckle and a Nightmare, were all that remained. They were

the lucky ones, exiting the gas cloud before it detonated; their allies were not as lucky and fell to the ground below.

Those two dragons looked at us, as we slowly glided by them. Each was thinking on continuing the fight, despite the losses they took. They only realized it was impossible for them to win when another member of my old Flight returned to me. Meatlug hovered nearby, falling into formation behind me.

That was the last stray. The two remaining dragons fled for their lives, both of them unwilling to face a losing battle. I smirked to myself. "What are you all doing here?" I asked them as we glided.

"I seek to fight these so called Outcasts," said Stormfly, which brought up even more questions.

Barf started, "And we thought."

Finished Belch, "â€¦it would be fun."

"Astrid thought you could use some help," replied Meatlug. Well, at least I was not completely on Astrid's badside. I had not had a chance to talk to her ever since we got back.

"That I do," I said. "Fighting off these forces would be easier with you all behind my back."

Stormfly snorted, "I suppose I can accept that."

"What I really want to know isâ€¦ how did you change back? You were among the Herd for months and never changed back until now." asked Meatlug.

Because I did not know my grandfather had a cloak that could change me back until now, of course. "Does it matter? I am here now and able to fight at my fullest."

"I suppose it does not," said Meatlug.

"Then where," started Belch.

Barf then added, "do we strike?"

"Their leader of course," I said. Yes, let's see how good Alvin is at taking down well trained Squires. These dragons of his were nothing more than glorified conscripts told to aimlessly use their Breath wherever they felt like. It would only be better if a whole Flight was here to witness Alvin's defeat. Of course, that had the problem that I needed to know where Alvin was first before I could do that. "Or we could destroy any waterborneâ€¦ vessels the Outcasts have. That would hamper their efforts."

Stormfly stoke up, "I had seen such things approaching by ocean before I came hereâ€¦ perhaps those could be our targets?"

One of the things I learned as a human was about the role of ships. My father, upon learning of, well, my being his youngest son, absolutely bombarded me with stories of sailing and of boats, enough that I got the idea of their function and purpose. The whole point of ships was to ferry either people or cargo over the water, whatever

that cargo or personnel was varied with what the mission of the ship was. In the case of a siege, ships would send more warriors into the fight or bring siege catapults to bear. So in defense of my home, destroying ships was every bit as important as taking down the dragons flying overhead. Andâ€¦ chances were, Alvin might have been aboard one of them. "Then, we should check them out," I replied as I led the group to the waterfront.

It feltâ€¦ good to once again be a part of a Flight, even if there were just four or five of us, depending on how you count Zipplebacks. Even though, I was not really a dragon. Everyone else had been human for a time, but that was an illusion, a disguise they wore. Me, I was the one pretending to be a dragon, but I thinkâ€¦ I was fine pretending to be one. It was better than being someone helpless. For the first time in ages, I finally felt like I had the power to do something.

A part of me wishes my brother could have joined me, maybe he'd understand. He lived his whole life being unwanted, now he had power. Maybe he would see the power we both had. Being Night Furies should have practically been our birthright, we deserved it. It was better than being just helpless boys.

* * *

><p>"Your dad is so going to kill you," complained Fishlegs as I climbed ever higher up Berk's sole mountain. He was right of course, I was supposed to be the responsible one and prevent my little brother from fighting in a serious battle while our dad takes care of business. I mean, that's what older brothers are supposed to be right? Instead, he ends up turning into a dragon and flying off to go fight Outcasts. All I thought that cloak was that it was just one of those ceremonial costumes for some weird rituals, or whatever; I had no idea it actually transformed whoever wore it. This was just so unfair.<p>

In fact, why did my grandfather even have such a costume? Last I checked, no ordinary Viking had ever seen a Night Fury up close until I started buying groceries again. Yet my grandfather had the details of the head completely right for a cloth hood; and that's before considering that it was enchanted somehow. Honestly, if anyone on Berk knew he had such a thing, maybe everyone would have taken his predictions a little more seriously. It certainly would have made my life so much easier if people accepted people turning into dragons before I didâ€¦

Although, now I had to wonder why the cloak was styled after a Night Fury of all things. It was starting to look way more than coincidence that everyone I knew in my family aside from my father ended up either becoming or having something to make someone become a Night Fury. It's like we inheritedâ€¦ turning into Night Furies of all things, if that was even possible. If I remember Rusec-Trader Al right, it had to do with that resonance thing, maybe there was some sort of connection.

There also had to be a reason we could use the book and no one else can't. Toothless said it was covered with Night Fury scales. As my brother and I were the only people who had the ability to use it, maybe there was a connection between us being Night Furies and our ability to use the book. Perhaps we also inherited the abilities of

our grandfather, since he was a soothsayer. After all, he probably made that strange cloak himself.

I just shook my head. It did not matter my grandfather had something a magical cloak in his basement or if he was the reason we had the power to use strange powers; I had to worry about my little brother.

Which is why I am attempting something a only a little less crazier than usual. Fishlegs's hands gripped around my neck, almost enough to strangle me. All I had to do was a snarl a little for him to give me enough room to breathe. "Sorry," he apologized, "I'm justâ€¦|scaredâ€¦|"

I just rolled my eyes; Fishlegs was scared of a lot if things, this was no different. Although, now that I thought on it, he did have very good reason to be afraid; I hoped he had good enough grip to hold on with enough control not to choke me. If he failed to do either of those things, well, he'd be dead.

I know my limits and my capabilities; I did not have the skill to fly, but I knew I could glide. Since gliding was an activity where I would constantly be dropping down as I went forward, the more height I had access to, the more distance go. So, I did the smart thing and give myself enough height to work with. It was especially easy since Old Wrinkly's place was situated near the base of the mountain and there were plenty of trails for me to find a high place.

It was at the end of one of these trails, standing over a relatively high peak and looking towards Berk off in the distance. From here, I could not see the fires the village felt as anything more than incredibly large bonfires. "Hiccup, are you sure you need me?" He still wanted to back out, but I did not let him.

'YES' I wrote in the nearby stone.

"Ohâ€¦|" whimpered my oldest friend. I did not want to risk him in a clearly dangerous exercise into the heat of combat, but I needed him. I needed Fishlegs just in case someone thought I was an Outcast dragon. While I have not seen or heard any Night Furies while I was in the village, I still wanted to be doubly sure. It's not like I'm any more useful to my brother if I was _dead, _now would I? Of course, that depended on if I had any uses while being _alive._

Let's dwell on that too much Hiccup, you had a brother to protect, after all.

Also, there was the benefit of having someone to talk for me. I could write to if I wanted to explain something, but that was very time consuming. If I needed to quickly tell my dad something, well, Fishlegs would be essential.

I flexed my wings and readied my tail, hopefully this would work. I stretched them out to my fullest, getting them into the positions I had perfectly memorized. The wind was strong, hopefully strong enough to take me all the way. just hope my brother was in the direction it was blowing in.

So, I leapt of the peak, letting the air catch me. The air beneath my

wings slowed my descent, keeping me afloat. I gently glided downhill, trying to balance the rate of my descent with my speed. If I went too fast or too slow, I would end up falling too quick.

I glided over rocks and between trees, nudging my wings in subtle directions to steer my course. So far so good, at the rate I was going, I could make it to Berk in a third of the time I would have if I just followed after my brother on foot. If there was one thing I learned about flying and gliding, it was that it was faster than walking or sailing. Traveling by air avoided many of the issues than land and sea based travel had. Such as, if there was a mountain in your way, you'd have to navigate around it, wasting valuable time if you went by boat or on foot. Flying allowed you to simply bypass the whole ordeal by going over it. And was if the speed of all of them was the same; I was faster gliding than I was running, meaning I was both moving faster and avoiding all of the obstacles in my direction other than a few trees. Although, my brother probably was off in Berk by now, probably causing a commotion somewhere; flying was faster than gliding.

Before I knew it, I was gliding over Berk with plenty of altitude left to spare. I could see below me the looks of townsfolk gawking at the sight of me. None of them were shooting or anything, they were just looking me. At least it wasn't like they were out right glaring me or anything, they were justâ€¦ amazed. Me, Hiccup the Useless amazed people? And in the positive way, too! That wasâ€¦ weird. I'm sure they were probably just waiting for me to fly away or something, right? No one could possibly think about that beingâ€¦ this was anything more than a burden or a curse, right?

I just shook my head, focus on mission, Hiccup, you can endlessly debate about this with your little brother once he's nowhere near Alvin.

I just had to do this tricky part. While I had managed to reach all the way to Berk from my grandfather's home, the only reason I was able to do that was because I was going downhill. From here, everything was mostly level, meaning I was going to be dropping relatively faster than I was previously.

All I had to do was just keep my wings straight as I went forward and hope I find a trace of my brother's whereabouts before I was in the direction of my father. Easy, right? I mean, I was lucky I was getting rather close to the burned down sections of the village so soon.

"There he is!" I heard a voice yell off in the distance. The Nightmare, leading a small flock of dragons, came barreling toward me. "There's the Night Fury, we must take him down and avenge our fallen!" Well, I guess it was too much to ask not to get noticed by anyone I did not want. Even worse was the fact they were outright hostile towards me the moment they saw me. Did my brother do something to infuriate them?

This was bad.

As long as I kept my wings open and steady, I would be able to keep gliding, but the moment I had to dodge anythingâ€¦ No, don't think about it. A small group of dragons, three in total, flew toward me, the Nightmare just ahead of the rest. They circled me, knowing I was

unable to rival them in speed, waiting to strike. They blasted me with fire in my direction.

I let go of my hold, bringing my wings down enough to drop a few feet, narrowly evading their attacks. Fishlegs screamed and grabbed hold of my neck again. Even more problems, just great.

The dragons, followed up their attacks by lunging at me, each time, I had to drop just a bit more to dodge each attack. Even better, I might have to start having to worry crashing into a house if I dropped any lower. I would gnaw on my own teeth if they were not completely retracted right about now. Worse yet, the dragons noticed just how utterly helpless I was.

"Look at him!" said one of the dragons, laughing at me. "He's not even a challenge, we should take out that little friend of his!" A cold chill ran up my stomach and I knew just how utterly helpless I was.

The next attack the dragons did was a coordinated assault. One them, the Nightmare prompted me into dodging by lashing his tail on my face. Another dragon, a Nadder tackled me, anticipating where I was going to be. On top of that, another dragon, another Nadder hit me again from the opposite side, hard.

Fishlegs did not stand a chance. He was knocked off me before I could even realize what happened. He was falling rapidly. All of them laughed while he screamed. This was stupendously, horrendously bad. I had to save him, but it would come at a price. I could accelerate myself, but I would have to drastically lower my altitude to grab him and then I did not even know if I could slow our descent fast enough to let him survive the fall. Worse yet, I'd be an open target; the dragons could just up and decide to kill me then, just when it looked like I could almost win.

I shook my head and narrowed my eyes. There was no time for this! I had to make my move. I folded my wings inward, curving the air around me to provide more speed at the expense of lift.

I flew directly to my friend, just above my falling friend. He was tumbling uncontrollably, screaming out his lungs from the fall. I had to this right, there was no room for error. With a sudden motion of my forelegs, I grabbed onto his waist and drew him near me. He was still screaming and I think his eyes were shut.

Now, came the hard part. I may have got Fishlegs, but we were still not safe. I could see the dragons chasing after me, all of them getting ready for one last attack. On top of that, I was getting rapidly close to hitting myself against a rooftop.

If I opened my wings, I'd slow myself down enough that I might, just might be able to slow ourselves down enough to land safely. And then the dragons would kill us.

If I did not open my wings, Fishlegs and I would crash. While chances were that I'd live, Fishlegs would almost certainly be dead.

If only I knew what to do, what course of action to take. I didn't know what to do. I memorized the wing positions, the motions I needed to take to steer, yet nothing I knew would help me here. I

wasâ€¦| helpless.

And thenâ€¦| I realized something, an idea came into my head. No, not in my head, an urging, an understanding that I knew I had the answer.

Iâ€¦|did not know what I was thinking; I wasn't thinking at all. I did not open my wings, yet, I did not do nothing as I fell downward. No, I narrowed them further.

"What is he crazy!?" I heard one of the dragons yelled in surprise. Yes, am very, crazy. I am full of crazy ideas.

I drew my wings even closer, bringing my speed fast as I could.

"It doesn't matter," said one of the dragons, they must have been so far above me now. "Take him down!"

And thenâ€¦| on the last movement, before I was level with the roof tops, I opened my wings and twisted my body forward. I did not hit the ground below, no instead, reaching speeds I never had dreamed of, I moved _parallel _against the ground.

I did not know what I was doing, not in the least, but it worked. I could feel my heart throbbing with the rush of speed. And as an added bonus, I completely dodged the dragons' combined use of their flame breath.

"We're not dead!" yelled Fishlegs in cheer, only to chance his tone at the last second. "Watch out!"

A line burning houses was in directly in my way. The same urges that told me how to cheat death once already gave me another suggestion. I.. flapped my wings a bit more andâ€¦| bent them. To my surprise, my body angled upward rapidly. With the same rapidity of motion that safed Fishlegs's life, I started to climb high into the air, bringing myself back to the altitude I was safely gliding earlier without even a minute passing.

Once I was a fair distance in the air, I leveled my body. It was then, I realizedâ€¦| "We're flying!" shouted Fishlegs.

I was climbing, completing my thought. I wasâ€¦| flying, not gliding, flying _well_.

"Get him!" I heard the Nightmare yelling behind me. He and his dragons were not going to leave me alone it seemed. They were relatively far away from me, for now; the massive boost of speed I had earlier gave me some breathing room. That could change at any moment, which meant that I needed to do something, something just as crazy as listening to my own gutsâ€¦| But for that, I would need to do something about Fishlegsâ€¦|

"Hiccup! Fishlegs!" I heard a voice yell down below.

"Astrid!" Fishlegs replied. Beneath me I could see Astrid plus a few more my friendsâ€¦| well, if they could be called friends. Still, it was perfect timing finding them here.

I rapidly descended, but slowed my speed just enough to let Fishlegs

down without harming him. "Take care of him!" I yelled.

Unfortunately, the dragons were still behind me, having caught up to me in the time I let Fishlegs go.

I saw the twins throw a set of bolas to the dragons behind me, ensnaring the two Nadders and dropping them to the ground. This left me with the Nightmare. Unfortunately for the twins _and me_, bolas tactics would not work so well against dragons that could set their skin ablaze. Even if they got him, he would just burn through it unless they got one made specifically for Nightmareâ€¦ and those were super heavy.

Without having to worry about Fishlegs's safety, I now only had to worry about my ownâ€¦ which I had proven many times in the past to be very inconsiderate about. The Nightmare, not caring about his teammates being downed still went after me.

I flew as fast as my body would let me, making twists and turns I never imagined myself ever doing before now and evading repeated blasts of flame. I wish Toothless taught me a little bit of air dragon combat, because now I was regretting it. I had no means to retaliate other than flying near my friends and allies and hope that they could take down my I had no weapons to speak of, noâ€¦ hang on a momentâ€¦

To anyone else, it would be a crazy plan; for me, it was just a plan.

I closed my wings and dropped to the ground, landing on my front feet. With my forepaws firmly planted on the ground and with my rear half still in the air, I used my momentum to quickly change my direction. One moment, I was facing away from the Nightmare, the next I was staring right at him.

In that short span of time, I built up the fire inside my throat, concentrating it to levels I had never done before. It was so much, even my throat burn a little; I guess dragons were not all that fireproof on the inside.

Before the Nightmare realized what my plan was, I blasted him with a small glowing sphere _point blank_.

For a brief moment, I did not know what happened. My vision blurred so much I could not even make distinct shapes and there was a loud ringing sensation in my ears like a thousand bells were being rung inside of it. I felt pain all over my body, most of it around my head and shoulders and some more on my backside.

I realized I was flat on my back on the ground for some reasonâ€¦ but why?

"Hiccup!" I could barely hear some voices calling out my name. "Hiccup!" I could not make out exactly who was yelling my name, but I had an idea of who it likely was.

My vision cleared enough to see my friends, each looking at me a bit afraid. "Hey guys," I said wearily.

"You're alright!" said Astrid. She looked different now. While the upper portions of her face were mostly fine, there was a large section of the side of her face and on her throat that had completely been covered in bluish scales. One of her ears had even disappeared completely, as if it was melted right off of her body. On closer inspection, even her teeth looked much sharper than usual. It was then I realized that she was not even speaking to me in _Norse,_ but rather that weird nameless language the dragons had. A part of me wanted to know what happened, just as much a part of me just wanted to _not know._

"Uh, yeah," I said. Maybe I should bring it up the next time we were not at risk from running into hostile Outcasts or dragons.

She smiled a bit. "Well, good to see one of us is alright."

Fishlegs just shook his head. "Oh, when will this day end?" he lamented. I agreed. I would really like the Outcasts to leave sometimes soon, but I don't think that was even going to happen until Alvin showed up.

"Oh, quit your bellyachin'," said Camicazi. "Hiccup beat a dragon as a dragon! And on his first flight of fancy no less!"

"Yeah!" said Tuffnut. "Now I want to be a dragon, too!"

"It looks so awesome," said Ruffnut. "Why don't we get to turn into dragons?"

"I dunno, maybe because you're not good enough to be a full dragon," muttered Tuffnut. That earned him a slap from his sister.

They would have fought over something completely if Snotlout and a complete stranger did not intervene by holding them away from each other. Everyone involved looked disappointed. Strangely though, I couldn't help but feel I met this guy before. I could not quite place it, but he _smelled_ familiar. Now, even though I had become a dragon, I did not go around smelling everyone I met; that was just plain rude. But I still had opportunities to know the scent of some of people I was close to, such as my little brother and my father, but this guy was familiar even to those strange senses. Maybe he was just someone who lived in Berk that I had just never met until now.

Astrid just shook her head at the sight of the twins. "Well, anyways it's good to have you back, Hiccup."

I rolled over to my legs and lifted myself up. My legs still hurt a little, but that was quickly fading. I was still glad that whatever injuries I took were still recovering at an accelerated rate. I guess one other good thing of being a dragon in my situation was that I did not have to worry about becoming _more dragon_ every time I got so much as a pinprick.

It was then I noticed the fallen body of the Nightmare and remembered what I had just done. I had only hoped to use that concentrated dragon fire to knock out the dragon, fling him back enough to force him away. I was counting on the fact that dragons were more or less impervious to fire. Well, all of that happened, the dragon was not burned by that blast of fire I did and he was flung back a fair

distance away.

It's where he was flung _to _that was the problem. I had launched the dragon into a nearby house, which had collapsed ontop of the Nightmare. He was still alive and conscious, struggling to free himself using what ability he had, but it was not doing him any good. The house fell on top of the dragon in perhaps the worst way possible. The sharp edges of wooden boards tore through several bits of wing, without a doubt rendering it completely useless and almost seemingly irrecoverable. Other pieces stabbed themselves into the dragon's side, almost as if they were spears if one squinted hard enough.

He gave up when he saw me stand up, a look that clearly looked like defeat fell upon his face. "Finish me," he said.

"No," I refused. "We have to get you help." Sure, this guy was chasing me with the intent to kill me, but that did not meant I couldn't at least be a decent humanâ€¦ dragon being.

"No," he refused my refusal.

"We can still save your life if you'd let us." Stepping forward, I tried to clear off some of the rubble. While I doubted he would ever fly again, with a little medical assistance I felt we could save his life.

"This life is not worth savingâ€¦" said the Nightmare.

"Why do you want to die?" I asked.

"So Iâ€¦ mightâ€¦ meet theâ€¦ the All-Father," said the dragon. "I want to goâ€¦ to his homeâ€¦" Which was very odd because as far as I knew dragons _never_ knew about our gods. Yet, here it was, I was talking to a dying dragon about Odin and about how he wanted to enter _Valhalla_. Thisâ€¦ was not a normal dragon. I suddenly had a feeling of dread in my stomach.

"What about the other place?" I asked, hoping he would not confirm my suspicious on. Because after all, Odin wasn't the only one interested in the souls of dead warriors. There were five other gods who chose from the slain. Four of these gods alongside Odin would pick them to add to them to Vahalla. Freya, who was not a war god, had her own hall, but she still tended to warriors.

The Nightmare laughed. He was clearly losing his mind along with his blood. "Wellâ€¦ the other place isn't so bad, but I heard the All-Father's was better. Only the worthy, the greatest of slain warriors, may enter either of themâ€¦ There is no greater honor than beingâ€¦ at the All-Father's sideâ€¦" I gulped, well, he definitely knew the rules. "I'mâ€¦ not going to have thatâ€¦ taken from meâ€¦ after I lost everything elseâ€¦" continued the Nightmare. And with those last words, he was gone.

Astrid looked at me, the same expression of shock was in her face. Well, I guess she somehow had the ability to understand dragons now, might have to do with loss of part of her face. "Hiccup," she said. "I think I knew how the Outcasts got all of these dragonsâ€¦"

I nodded my head. "They're as dragon as I amâ€¦" Suddenly, it all

made sense. According to my little brother, they were acting pretty strange for dragons, since they were not even the least bit worried about why I was having problems flying. They also did not even refer to themselves as 'Kin', something apparently every dragon did. Sure, it was odd, but I did not think much of it at the time. But now that I knew the truth, the reason they were not using the same customs as dragonsâ€¦ was because they were not really dragons. I do not know how Alvin did this or who these dragons really were, but one thing's for sure, I had to stop him. "I think dad might want to know about thisâ€¦"

* * *

><p>It's normal for Vikings to lose things, it's our occupational hazard. Often times, we risk life and limb only to lose both. But for a proud Viking as hard to kill and as tough as I was, it seemed like the Norn had other means of making me suffer.<p>

In the span of twenty years, I had lost so much it almost seemed like I was being cursed for breaking some unknown taboo. First, I had lost my best friend. Second, I had lost my wife. And recently, I had lost my son, _twice._ Now, it was as if the Norns had decided to take pity on me, rewarding me with good fortuneâ€¦ with interest.

My son was returned to me, changed but alive. With my old son, I had learned I had a second, another child, one who showed such promise. On top of this, I learned that my wife, Valhallarama, was alive, _alive._ Such news was the sort of thing you'd only find in a great epic. I had lost so much, yet suddenly I had gotten some of it back.

After the ordeal I have gone through, I have wanted so much to desperately hold on to these things, to make up for the mistakes of my past, I wanted to do better as a father. I wanted to get to know my youngest son, to know what kind of life he had been living away from me; I wanted to let him know I was interested in him. As for my oldest, I've been saving up what extra money I had. As soon I have enough, I'll announce a quest or try to find a good magician to break whatever spell is upon him; he did not deserve to be stuck like that for the rest of his life. And if that won't work, well, at least I can afford to pay for whatever goal in life he wants to set, arcane or mundane. I just wish it was easier to ignore the fact he's covered in scale and bigger than me.

But I did not receive everything I had lost. I could never forgive Alvin for what he did all those years ago. I lost my best friend all those years ago and I _did not_ _want him back._

As Chief, I was relied upon to give guidance and strategy in times of crisis, tonight was no different. The problem was that tonight I was fighting very unusual circumstances. I was lost for words to describe this place. Fighting against human enemies was simple, you had an enemy that more or less had the same advantages and pool of stratagems to combat you; you knew his actions just as much as he knew yours and it was a test to see who was better at responding to what. Oh, and whoever had Odin's favor had a distinct advantage, that went without saying. Against dragons, you typically had to rely on damage control and strong defenses. The dragons were typically more interest in stealing than they were killing or burning. You could only discourage the beasties, but they weren't after your blood.

A combined force of Vikings and dragons was a different matter entirely. First off, dragons could pick up Vikings and drop them off in enemy territory. This meant that traditional methods of defense, blocking off troop movements with walls and high cliffs was far less effective; they could just fly over them. Second, the dragons provided constant harassment against purely ground forces. Whatever defending forces had to deal with both air and ground battle simultaneously, reducing their effectiveness to combined arms tactics.

For whatever reason the dragons sided with the Outcast, I did not know, but I guess Alvin was practically part dragon alreadyâ€¦

What bothered me more than the dragons was all of the Outcasts. When I broke apart Outcast Island, Alvin had fewer forces there. Suddenly, now he had enough to openly attack a village. Dragons or no dragons, it was odd he had so many able bodied men to join his cause. Did the Outcasts have a recruitment campaign or something?

I just shook my head, I had no time to dwell on it for too long. Using my spyglass, I spotted several ships that had docked in the harbor. Ever since the fighting started, I have had to pull back from the docks to reinforce and hold ground topside. With the archers and siege catapults too busy with the dragons to attack the ships en mass, whatever forces were on the docks were likely going to get slaughtered without any fire support.

The Outcasts landed on Berk's docks without any trouble. They swarmed off the tightly packed ships, eager and ready for war. Alvin was on one of them, still looking like the frightful abomination he had become. I could not see the finer details from this range and in the dark, but I could tell it was him. He got off his ship last, after all of the other ones had been cleared.

With the mass of Vikings from them cleared, one odd thing I noticed about the Outcast ships was that there were dragons tied to their decks. I could not tell what condition they were in, but I could make out that one of them was a rather large Nightmare. By the looks of things though, they were not going to play a hand in this fight, so there was no reason to worry about them. "Are the preparations ready, Gobber?"

"Well, sort of," said Gobber. "Bob the Sled is covering our left flank, while Spitelout has our rightâ€¦ Don't you think this is taking it a _wee bit _ too far?"

"That's all I needed to know Gobber," I replied. He shrugged and went off somewhere in the back, mostly to make sure that everyone was well armed.

I turned towards the lines of warriors behind me. Hopefully, the combined forces led by my brother and aâ€¦ relatively trusted member of the community would provide my forces with enough cover to defend unimpeded. My stratagem for defense required that whatever forces I led would only be fighting human enemies.

Berk was situated at the top of a steep cliff with some manually constructed ramps leading from the docks to the top. While they were not the only way to and from Berk proper, it was certainly the

fastest. Today, I would be destroying these ramps, all but one of them. "Do it now! Set them on fire!" I ordered. Hundreds of torches and burning arrow from off in the distance quickly engulfed the transport ramps to my far left and my far right in flames. While they still stood, there was no guarantee how long that would the case. It might take days or even weeks to repair or replace them, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

The only ramp that was still standing was the one right in front of me.

Now Alvin had two choices, either he and his men braved the assault up the ramp, braving attacks by marksmen only to face a tightly defended choke point, or he chose to go around and take the long way through the forests, giving me more time to setup an even stronger defense. Technically, he had that choice to begin with anyways, but I decided to make the choice even harder to take.

Unfortunately for me, it seemed like Alvin and his cronies had lost their fears as well as their sanity. Either that or they were more scared of Alvin. I did not blame them.

The Outcasts marched up the ramp in great numbers, far more than that series ramp should have held. "Loose your arrows," I shouted, archers and marksmen launched their shots. I only had maybe twenty dedicated marksmen covering the ramp, but it was enough given how tightly pack it was. With the Outcasts all so tightly bunched up, it was hard for them to miss.

But for every injured man, two more were there to take his place, often times, pushing the unfortunate soul off the ramp because he was in the way. I did not have to look hard see several unfortunate men meet their ends. Well, they were definitely stubborn Vikings, I'll give them that. I had to hand it them, they were already somewhere over halfway up the ramp. Romans or Frenchmen would probably still be stuck at the bottom.

And then Alvin stepped in, leading from the front. "Come on you horrible excuses for Marauders! if you don't hurry up maybe I give you some one on one time with my new play things" or you could join them!" I had no idea what it was in Alvin's words that rallied his troops, but they marched up the ramp with double the speed.

"Get ready, men!" I shouted in response. I picked up my sword and my shield, waiting to do battle.

I've been waiting for this day ever since I met Alvin nearly a month ago. I might not have had Bertha by my side, but I had prepare accordingly. Alvin wants to go break my sword, again? Fine, I have five of them, ready to be drawn at a moment's notice; all of them were from my sons. Alvin thinks he was the strongest and most deadly combatant? Well, I've been training myself non-stop.

I was never going to lose my sons to him again.

No matter how much the archers attacked the men on the ramp, I knew it was only going to delay them. Alvin, followed by a small team of Outcasts, were to first people to survive the assault. One, maybe two, arrows were stuck his side, with a dozen or so more stuck to a shield of his; I guess even he does not want to test his

'invincibility'; no man would want to be a living pincushion, correction, no sane man. Still, he pulled the arrows out as if it was nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

"Stoick," said the Outcast Chief as he slowly approached me, as if he were greeting me to polite conversation. Alvin was more or less the same since I last saw him, so I figure he must have been cautious in the interim, not risking himself or getting injured. Unfortunately for me, his right arm was back; I had hoped the injury my eldest inflicted would be lasting, but apparent it was not.

I approached Alvin. Maybe I could get an idea of what he was doing here in the first place. Besides, the archers were still shooting and very few Outcasts were able to risk the rain of death above them. Or I could just force him off. "Get off my island, Alvin." My warriors readied to strike at the Outcast Chief and his men, but they were holding stillâ€¦ for now. At my command, they would take down our enemies.

"Why? I can't go revisit my old home or speak to some old friends?" One other thing I noted was that Alvin now had a spear in his right hand handâ€¦ if it deserved to be called a spear at least. Really, it looked more like someone found a jagged and rusted piece of metal and stuck it where a proper spear tip would have been. Was it even really a weapon? Andâ€¦ last I checked, wasn't Alvin more of axe or sword type of person? The spear was hardly a weapon he fancied back when I used to know him. "Why? I still haven't thanked the boy who showed me just how boring ordinary life used to be. Much more enjoyable ripping someone's guts out bet me own finger tips."

"Leave, Alvin, you're not touching Hiccup, again," I said. I shook my head. No, I should end this here and now. "Take him down, men!" I said. The warriors closest to Alvin and myself charged at the Outcast Chief, all of them willing to be the one to earn to glory that came from besting this monster.

I almost joined them, willing charge in and take a shot against my former friend, yet I didn't. I did not know why, but something about that spear made me hesitateâ€¦

Suddenly I knew why. Instead of ordering his men to charge in response or levy some sort of defensive position, Alvin told them to stand back. The Outcast Chief lowered his spear â€¦ and pointed at the wave of charging warriors.

Fire erupted from the metal shard, forming into a shape that reminded me vaguely of flaming serpents with huge gapping maws. These serpents wrapped themselves around my men, causing them to convulse and scream in utter agony. Alvinâ€¦ just killed my men, some of which were former colleges, friends of his with a simple a gesture of his hand. The screams and fire lasted for a minute, each second felt like it was a decade.

My men and I, those of us who were not caught in the blast anyways, wisely backed away. It was suicide, unglorious to die in such a fashion. Even the archer stopped firing once they saw the carnage. I guess the only mercy we all had was that even the Outcasts were unwilling to move forward, too.

"How could you, Alvin?" I spat. "How could you kill like that?"

"Oh, I'm not killing them, Stoick," said the Outcast Chief. He picked up the fallen body of one of the warriors closest to him. Surprisingly, the warrior was still alive, desperately flailing and moving his arms and legs. It made no sense, Alvin blasted my men with fire, yet this one was still alive. _He should have been dead! _Why was heâ€¦ I learned why when Alvin tore off the man's tunic. His chest was covered in a faint covering of purplish scales, revealing what Alvin had intended. Once he was done with the man, Alvin threw him back onto the ground. " "I am changing themâ€¦ I ashore you it's quite painful, wouldn't want it to be easy on them wouldn't I?. Sadly it only last a few hours, but in the end they always end up being all-dragon. So now tell me Stoick, you think it's a little too much? I mean slowly becoming a monster is one thing but forcing others to do so... I think i might have just reached a new time low, don't you think?"

Everyone stayed silent and backed away even further, all of us were now a bit afraid. Even if it was not immediately fatal, I do not think ordinary people were willing to enjoy such a painful incapacitation with a wholly undesirable result. A few brave souls went forward to take the still bodies of our fallen, Alvin did not seem to mind in the slightest. Suddenly, I think I knew where all of the dragons came from. Alvin, is nothing sacred left for you? "What do you want, Alvin?" I snapped.

"Give me ya boy Stoick," said the Outcast. "After all, ya little disappointment started this mess. I want him."He was obviously talking about Hiccup. It was his potion that made Alvin into what he wasâ€¦ and probably what gave Alvin the idea to pursueâ€¦ this of all things. Why he wants him, I did not know nor did I care.

I went over my options, all them were the various means I would rip off Alvin's head. "You're not getting him!"

"Well, I'm very sorry to hear tha'," said my old, former friend, even though I knew he wasn't. He blasted me and a few warriors that stood beside me with that spear of his, the sensation of pain was so overwhelming that I fell onto my knees. The worst part of it all was that no matter how hard I tried, my eyes would not close. Those snakes, those twisting serpents of flame, moved and acted as though they were real in my eyes, each biting and hissing like a contorted mess. I could not move as the snakes burned into my flesh, even now I could feel that the skin beneath my armor wasâ€¦ changing.

And then, I heard someone from the Outcast side shout. "Night Fury, get down!" Alvin pointed his spear away from me and into the air. As soon as that happened, the serpents disappeared in an instant and I fell to the ground face first.

Using my hands, I tried to push my body upwards, just enough for me to get a better view of what was happening. I covered my eyes as a blast of bluish light exploded right in front of me, a cloud of dust forming and obscuring me.

When the dust settled, I found myself looking face to faceâ€¦ with a Night Fury. A Night Fury, not Hiccup. I knew it wasn't him, I knew my own son's face. This dragon's scales were slightly darker and his face was slightly more rounded than my son's. Yet, unfamiliar dragon

or not, I could somehow tell by the look of its eyes that it was worried for me. Why would a strange dragon worry for me anyways? The dragon then licked away at my face, wiping away the dirt. It all reminded me of the times I had met dogs and how they would lick their owner's faces with loving affection. This dragon I knew it meant me no harm.

"Well, would ya lookie here, just who I've been waitin' for," said Alvin. The unfamiliar dragon turned away from me and began growling. Alvin thought this was my son. "Get 'im boys!" he shouted, only to recoil from a bombardment of fire from overhead. More dragons, a Zippleback, a Gronckle, and Nadder all blasted away at the gathered Outcasts, forcing some of them into retreat. I don't even know what was going on, but I don't think I was in any condition to turn down help, even if it came from dragons.

Alvin though, would not give up, just like any good Viking wouldn't. I saw him drop his spear and throw his shield at the Night Fury, providing him with just enough time to rush and slam his fist into dragon's face. The Night Fury almost fell on top of me, but I was dragged by my legs before that could happen. I turned and found that Gobber was responsible for that. "Well, that's a close one."

My best friend carried me away from the fight that ensued between the two dragons, but I could still see. He laid my back against a nearby house, far enough away that I was in far less danger.

Meanwhile, Berk Vikings charged in, slamming themselves against the Outcast Vikings. Even though I had fallen, they were still willing to fight. This time, with some dragons on our side, the Outcasts had no chance.

Unfortunately, things were not going good for my would be savior. Night Furies were fast, almost invisible against the night sky. Apparently, though, that did not mean much while on the ground. Alvin repeatedly kept punching the dragon in the face. While the dragon was much larger than him, all that meant from what I could see was that it was just a bigger target. It tried to fight back, using its forelegs to block the incoming damage and try to take to the air but to no avail.

Alvin though, was quite content to hammer his fist against the dragon. He probably thought that was Hiccup and was hoping to knock out the dragon. Things changed when I saw Alvin draw something from his belt. It was an arrow, seemingly ordinary save for the silvery luster of its tip. I recognized it and knew what the Outcast Chief intended to do with it; Alvin clearly wanted to repay my son for the injury he gave him nearly a month ago. The dragon recoiled at the sight of it, but to no avail.

Alvin struck the Night Fury in its arm. Emerald green fire raced up the dragon's arm and engulfed it. The dragon backed away and fell to the ground as his arm was consumed in the blaze. When the blaze cleared, all I could see was an all too human arm replacing the formerly draconic appendage, one all too skinny and far too small for a dragon's body. Even stranger, its body seemed to be aware of it and correcting that.

"Well, that's not what I was expecting," said Alvin as he loomed over the rapidly shrinking form of the Night Fury.

The Night Fury's body progressively grew more humanoid by the second. It rapidly declined in height and in size right before my very eyes, becoming far smaller than the average Viking in an instant. The changes stopped only a moment later, the dragon now sized appropriately like someone who had just entered in his teen years. It looked more like a boy who just happened to have scales and a dragon's head than anything resembling what he was prior.

The former Night Fury then used it human arm to pull back something. It was either something or the former dragon was pulling back his head; I don't know, I couldn't see at this distance. Whatever he did though, it caused the changes to resume again, making the former dragon even less draconic. Wings, scales, and tail vanished or turned into black fabric.

Once the changes stopped, I only need to look at the former dragon's face to know who he was. It was Toothless dressed up in an cloak with part of its right side burned off. "Wha'? You ain't Stoick's boy!"

"I am!" spat my young son. I could believe what I was seeing. Even my youngest son ends up turning into a Night Fury! Just what kind of insanity was I living out?

Alvin looked infuriated. He opened up his hands and extended his vicious claws. He was what Fishlegs and my eldest described as an Exterminator, a fitting name for how deadly he was. The Outcast Chief had the clear intend to rip apart my son with his hands and claw alone. I wanted to get up, to save him, but my body would not obey me; intense pain, which I had been trying to ignore ever since I had been burned, kept me from moving my legs. Still, my youngest stood defiant, as proud and as bold as any Viking.

The standoff came to an end when Alvin was sent flying back a few inches as a bolt of lightning struck him. For a moment, I thought it had come from Thor, himself, a sign of divine favor against my most hated enemy.

Except that it did not come from the sky above but from somewhere on the ground. I followed the path of the lightning bolt, finding just who sent it at the very end. Every one, human or dragon, Outcast invader or Berk resident, all stood silent and in amazement as Mildew stepped forward toward the beast that was Alvin. Since when did Mildew know sorcery, let alone hurling lightning bolts? I had known Mildew since I was a boy, but never in my whole life had I known he could anything like that. More sorcery, it always had to be more sorcery. I was perfectly happy living a relatively low sorcery involving life, now I was finding out about this stuff every week.

"I don't think my mum did anythin' like tha," muttered Alvin as he picked himself up off the ground. Mildew launched another bolt of lightning from his staff, but this time Alvin managed to dodge it and made his way to Toothless. Lifting my son by the neck, with one hand, it was clear that he was willing and able to kill him then and there. "You best better back off before he gets it!" Alvin must have been scared if he was willing to use a hostage in a time like this. I did not blame him, a man who had lightning at his command might have been frightening.

"Pft," snorted Mildew, holding his staff high. "I don't care at all about him. As far as I'm concerned, both of you are better off dead." What!? Did Mildew really just say that? Sure, no one in Berk liked him all that much, but it's not like any of us actively wanted him dead. This, however, placed him on top of my kill list, only just above Alvin.

"Well, alright, have it yer' way," muttered Alvin as he backed off closer to the cliff. I saw the fear in my son's eyes as he and I both knew what was going to happen next.

Because of Mildew's words, Alvin found no point to keep my son alive as a hostage. So he was useless to him now, not really anything more than a distraction. Because it was simply faster and easier, he threw youngest right off the cliff.

Toothless screamed; I wanted to scream.

* * *

><p>For those of you wondering if the twins will ever receive their own snippet, that is incredible unlikely. I do not think I can conceivable write anything _**close**_** to the ammount of absurd and insane logic I would need to portray it properly.**

It might seem inconsistent that the Knights, who were more experienced fell victim, while their Squires (Toothless and Co.) are handling themselves just fine. It is not, the difference was circumstances. The Knights were caught in a surgical ambush attack before being rushed down by numbers of dragons. Their own numbers were thrown into disarray because of the shook and poor management in the conflict. Commoners are laborers, grunts, not soldiers, not warriors. Oh and the Outcasts had weapons and tools that made the ambush even more effective, such as traps, nets, spears, and of course ranged weapons.

This is not an instance of 'plot armor', but rather a demonstration of how utterly **_devastating **_**a surprise attack is even against the greatest warriors. Lots of the Outcast's dragons fell to take down the Knights, too.**

So, here's something about "catching" falling people. The actual damage from the fall is not from hitting the ground but rather from the sudden deceleration from the loss of movement. It's actually pretty deadly if you don't find a way to slow a person down first before catching them. Also, hitting water is worse than hitting concrete if you go fast enough. I bring this up because of a certain scene in the season 2 finale where Hiccup and toothless catch a falling Astrid right before she was about to fallâ€¦ To Dreamwork's credit, she did suffer lots of bodily harm even though she was caught.

23. Chapter 23

**Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

**Had some trouble writing this, mostly from arc fatigue, but I think

I am satisfied by how this ended.**

**Please remember to read and reveiw. **

* * *

><p>My whole body was wracked with pain, the burns caused by Alvin's staff were still fresh. Magic aside, these burns were about as real as any burns I had; the only difference as far as I could tell was that my skin became scale instead of being charred. I wonder if my eldest had ever been burned like this before. It probably was not painful at all to him anymore.<p>

And yet, all that pains of my body were dull and impotent in comparison to the pain of my heart. My son, my youngest son, was falling to his doom and all I could do was sit and watch. I wanted to move, to run out and catch my son before he fellâ€| but I knew that that was impossible. My son disappeared beneath the cliff's edge, certainly falling to his death. I could not save him.

But I did not know what I could do. Gritting my teeth, I pushed myself off the ground, using the wall for extra leverage. My legs almost buckled under the weight of my suffering, but I did not care. Alvin and Mildew would pay for their actions from this day: revenge would be mine.

"Stay down, Stoick!" snapped Gobber as he placed his hand on my shoulder, trying to keep me down.

I slapped his arm away and got to my feet. It still hurt to move forward, but I was still Chief and did not get to where I was by just sitting down and doing nothing. I wouldn't let a little thing like being burned alive slow me down; I've known men who've kept fighting despite that and I feel I have worse stubbornness issues. Each step might have been little more than a slight hobble forward, but I was not going to lose sight of my goal.

"Stoick!" yelled Gobber, holding firm to my arm, preventing my advance.

Fine, if that's how he wanted to do things, I was going to drag him with me. I put more power into my steps, firmly taking my oldest friend along the ride. His feet dug into the dirt, but he still slid just a little bit farther with every step I took. "Let me go, Gobberâ€|" I managed to choke out. It hurt to talk, but I needed let to go: I wanted to avenge my son.

With what little flexibility I still had in my neck, I turned to look into my friend's eyes and he in to mine. He let me go. "I'll take care of the battlefield," he muttered. "Just make sure Odin better not take Alvin when you're through with him, because I want a piece for myself."

I continued to step forward.

The battle raged on ahead of me, Hooligans versus Outcasts, magic versus monster.

The assorted mess of Viking warriors went back to fighting each other, once the initial shock of Mildew's little display had ended.

It was clear that we were winning; the Outcasts were thoroughly outmatched in numbers, if not skill, without any reinforcement or support, an absolute worst case scenario. I doubt any of them were going Valhalla. Cowards never get picked.

Even better, the dragons, the ones that came along with my son, had cut off the Outcasts from any possible reinforcement and retreat by blocking off the ramp with a wall of flame. They were not attacking blindly at the mix of Vikings, so it was very clear they were on our side. Maybe those dragons were Vikings from other Tribes, wronged by Alvin's treachery and saw an opportunity to correct that. Thankfully, it seemed the archers were far too busy shoot at them; far as I was concerned, they were honorary Hooligans for their support. I am glad that my marksmen were able to see they were on our side.

Meanwhile, Alvin and Mildew went at each other. If there was one thing I had to learn from their fighting, it was that magic was the best counter to magic. Alvin charged against the would be sorcerer. Mildew responded by throwing a blast of lightning at the rampaging half dragon, knocking him away before he could get close to use his claws.

For a man so far past his prime, Mildew's magic gave him an edge against Alvin. Whereas the strategies I had thought up to fight my enemy were basic and head on, ranged offensive magic seemed to be a far simpler and reliable counter. Alvin could not catch a bolt of lightning like he could an arrow and was forced to dodge each attack or get hit. If he charged, the lightning would send the dragon back before he could take out the old man. This was especially important as that all of Alvin's abilities, dragon or otherwise, were more suited to quick, up-close melees.

But I knew Alvin was smarter than some random beast, even though he acted like one. After the third failure to lunge at the old man, Alvin took up his spear. Mildew tried to blast him with his magic, but Alvin rolled out of the way. Landing on the ground, Alvin countered attacked with his own blast of burning snakes.

Mildew slammed his staff into the ground, forming what can only be described as a wall of lightning bolts to swirl around him. From what I could see, Mildew seemed completely reliant on his staff to do anything.

All this time, I had simply written off that staff ornamented with few dragon's teeth that the old man had on him as just a walking stick for use in his old age, not some sort of magical weapon. Now, I heard he traveled long and far back when I was a boy, but I never imagined he had anything like that. I guess he did not want to be any worse of a pariah he already was; magic was one of those things that was always feared than respected. I could imagine people might start respecting him more, if not for one thing; he still lost any respect he could possibly ever get from me for writing off my son like he did.

Alvin's attack was dispersed the moment it into contact with the wall of lightning, not even touching the old man. And I knew that was the opportunity that Alvin was hoping for. In battle, managing time were essential. A hair's breadth of a second could mean the difference between life and death. A warrior using his arm to swing a sword as

part of attack meant that same arm and sword cannot be used for defense, unless he were fast enough to interrupt his attack to defend yourself or evade the blow. In that moment, the area that arm and sword would have covered was vulnerable and all it would take was a well placed strike to take that warrior down. This is precisely what happened with Mildew; Mildew used up his time and his staff to defend, giving Alvin enough room to close to distance between. Alvin lunged at Mildew, spear in hand. I don't know how effective that magical wall was, I was fairly sure Mildew would likely die.

The old man, though, immediately saw his mistake. He lifted his staff, causing the wall of electricity to immediately disperse and parried Alvin's spear away, knocking both weapons to the ground. Unfortunately for Mildew, Alvin did not need weapons.

Alvin swiftly punched the old man, sending him toppling backwards before following it up with another and then another. Mildew landed to the ground. He might have been a powerful sorcerer, but he was still just an old man physically. He went down, easily and with a groan. "That was for getting mi' way old man," spat Alvin, both verbally and physically.

"You're just another monster," said Mildew. "And I've seen plenty of monsters die before."

Alvin just smirked. His mouth was definitely full with sharper teeth than it was a few moments prior, the result of his rapid healing no doubt. He picked up Mildew's staff and broke in two before throwing nearby the old man. "Yer pathetic, killin' you would be a waste of my time."

Of course, with Alvin so busy fighting with and later gloating over Mildew, that gave me enough time to get adjusted to the body was wracked in. The first few minutes were like walking barefoot through a bushfire, but it wasn't all too bad, especially when plenty of distractions. It wasn't long before I left like I could walk normally and then run.

The moment Alvin had his back turned, I knew I had the perfect opportunity to strike. We Vikings might talk a whole lot about things like 'honor', but war was a situation where winning was always more important. All the honor in the world was not worth a losing a war and glory over. I drew my second sword and lunged forward, my blade pointing at Alvin's back.

Arruptly, Alvin turned around the moment I was close enough, robbing me of an easy victory. With his eyes still in shock, he parried my strike with sword like claws, but it was too late. I struck Alvin in the chest. I quickly drew back, leaving the sword in his chest and drawing the third.

He gritted his fangs as he pulled the blade out of his chest, throwing it aside to let him have time to heal. He cringed in very visible pain. Alvin might have been seemingly immortal, but he was not immune to pain. "How are you still standing?" yelled Alvin in disbelief. "You should be at my feet, begging me to kill you!"

"Nothing hurts as badly as having your son die, Alvin," I said. I was still hurting in both my body and my heart, but I was not defeated

just yet. "Except what I am going to do to you."

"We'll see about that!" yelled Alvin as he charged. The wound in his chest was still bleeding, but maybe I could exploit that.

If there was an advantage a sword had over sword-like claws, it's that the claws had far less reach. I simple chose to exploit that. I ducked under a swipe and hit him in the leg, causing him to fall onto his knees from my strike.

I was about to follow it up with another attack, but Alvin though had gotten better with his own defending enough to catch the blade in his hands. He tore the blade apart, but I used this time to take the jagged stump of the blade to strike at my foe's chest yet again.

Alvin decided to start taking me apart as well. Despite the fact I was fighting, I was still spending much of my attention and concentration on just trying to maintain a hold on my painful burns. That made it harder for me to anticipate and react to kind of retaliation. Alvin swiped his claws at both of my arms, drawing blood from the claw marks.

At that point, all of the pain I had been trying to hold back overflowed in my senses. I was immediately struck helpless in an wave of crushing pain and agony. Alvin kicked me down as a recoiled, knocking me once again onto the ground as quickly as he stood up.

You know I had this whole plan to give you a slow, painful death but maybe I should just kill you nowâ€|I might not get the satisfaction I want but it will save me plenty of trouble," he said as he pulled the jagged piece of the sword over his head, preparing to strike. This was the endâ€| unless some sort of miracle happened.

"Snotlout! Snotlout! Oi! Oi! Oi!" I heard. Suddenly, just then my nephew came out from nowhere and rammed his cudgel at the half dragon's side, buying me the desperate time I needed. Alvin was sent back a few paces, not falling to hit the ground, but definitely recoiling from the blow.

And who would you be boy?" yelled Alvin. "I want to know the name of the bug i'm going to crush."

There was a boy standing next to him. I never seen him before, but he was taller than my nephew by maybe over a head. He wasn't overly muscled, but I could tell he could probably carry his weight around if he needed. He did, strangely have darkish hair. The boy though, introduced Snotlout for him, "He's the one and only Snoutfacedâ€|" Just not perfectly.

"Snotfaced!" yelled my nephew, in frustration.

"â€|Snotlout." continued the boy, sheepishly.

It was at this point, I heard a roar coming from nearby the duo, to which Snotlout responded with a "Hey, he got it wrong!" The source of the noise responded a gain, as if it was having a conversation with my nephew. It took me a moment to realize it, I could tell it was a Night Fury call and more specifically, whose call it was.

"Well, finally, you show up," said Alvin. "I heard you've done and gone all the way. Look at you, not even human anymore."

Hiccup, with the blonde girls, Astrid and Camicazi, atop of him, drew into my view. The two girls got off, their weapons ready and pointed at Alvin, separating Alvin from the rest of us. Hiccup gave me a slight lick on my hands; what was it with both of my sons licking me? "I'm alright, sonâ€" I said, solemnly, "I just wish I could say the same for Toothlessâ€"

'WHERE DID HE GO?' wrote my son.

"Alvin threw him over the cliff," I said mournfully. I lost my youngest son, after only a week of actually having him as my son; how could I not feel so negative about that?

Hiccup's huge draconic eyes narrowed as he wrote. 'STAY HERE, I'LL BE BACK.' And then before I could say anything from where he stood, my eldest just flapped his wings and took off with the same amount of ease as one would use to get out of a chair. He flew higher and higher before rapidly sinking down under the cliff face. It was amazing to say the least, never in my wildest dreams had I dreamt that my son, the one that everyone, even myself, had dubbed 'Useless' appear to be soâ€" competent at flying. I guess he won in Choosing, but back then everything was allâ€" in an awkward phase to say the least.

"Hey get back here!" yelled Alvin as my son, the very reason he came here in the first place, left him.

"Well, he's got better things to do," said Camicazi. "You're just going to have to wait for him to come backâ€" if he ever comes back."

Alvin was infuriated, but still not attacking. The injuries I had given him had still not fully closed up and he was most likely unsure of dealing with someone who had undergone the same potion he himself had. Snotlout's distinctâ€" snout does mark him as being a little abnormal. It was then I heard of a dragon's cry as it went down. Alvin gave a stern look as we turned to look at our newcomer. It was the Nadder, landing nearby. The dragon had a vicious and angry look on its face, rage and frustration all being directed at Alvin.

"Oh, hey, Stormfly!" yelled Camicazi cheerily. Astrid turned to the dragon, giving only an unspoken nod of the head. The dragon turned and looked at the Hofferson's prized child a nod of the head of its own. Clearly, they knew that dragon or more accurately, Viking, and cared forâ€" it, at least enough to do gestures of respect at each other. I do question what kind of sane person would name their kid 'Stormfly', but then again with such gems as 'Fishlegs' and 'Meatlug', it's hard to really call it that unusual. Still, I knew how bad it felt to not be able to help someone you cared for.

"Well, looks like we have more help," I said, picking myself up and drawing one of my two remaining swords. "Well, I was thinking Snotlout and I would be better off with just the two of us, but I suppose it's fine if you decided to help in." This was not honorable combat by any stretch of the imagination, but honor was impossible to get in war anyways.

"We were going to?" asked Snotlout, almost hesitantly. "I mean, of course, we were," he said, changing his mind. Maybe it was just a slip of the tongue

Astrid and Camicazi nodded, both of them readying themselves for the fight.

The unfamiliar boy also got out of the way, moving to the sidelines. He must not have been a combatant or much of a fighter. Which was fine; if he wasn't a fighter, then he was a liability in a fight. Out in the distance, I could also see, to my horror, the twins moving towards a nearby stalemate between the defenders and the invaders. That could be bad. Hopefully, the fact Fishlegs went after them would curtail any damage they would cause.

"Well, this ain't fair," said Alvin, picking up his magical spear once more. Now, the injuries he took had fully recovered, meaning that I would have to start wearing him down again, this time, without the element of surprise to help me out. Good thing I was never intending to play fair. Five on one, the odds were in my favor. "This will be too easy!"

* * *

><p>This was the stupidest idea I ever had. I wanted to be brave, to show just how capable I really was, even as just Toothless, Toothless the Useless boy. Instead, I was now going to face certain death. I screamed at the top of my lungs as Alvin threw me off the cliff.<p>

Worst of all, all of this reminded me of how mother used to throw me off a cliff when I was still learning to fly. I survived, obviously, but that was because I had wing, wait, maybe if I. . I had no idea where Alvin got the arrow he stabbed me with, but all I was sure of was that its effects damaged my brother's cloak, rendering it incapable of keeping me a full Night Fury. I could still feel it had plenty of magic however, enough to give me wings.

I pulled the hood of my cloak over my head, the transformation I had experienced earlier only completing itself less than halfway. I was mostly human shaped that much I knew, humans did not have wings, scales, or tails; likewise dragons did not have arms or hands. About the only part of me that did not change was my right arm, since that was the place where Alvin's arrow disrupted the powers of my cloak.

Thankfully though, Alvin did not hit somewhere in my chest or on my back, that would have meant I could not cheat my own death. My wings, I could tell were much too small for me to fly, but gliding, on the other hand I opened my wings, using them to control my fall. I slowed myself, drastically lowering my speed enough that I would not end up a bloody smear when I landed.

I sighed, that was one disaster averted.

"Hey! Look at that! That boy stopped himself from falling!" I heard. Turning my head, I saw the horde of Outcast warriors, still stationed at the last ramp that led to the docks. All of them were kept from advancing and joining in the battle above by the wall of flame

created by Barf, Belch and Meatlug. None of them looked too pleased since most of them had their shields covered by dozens of arrows.

"He's not one of ours!" said one man. I guess it wasn't hard to figure out the half Night Fury boy was not siding with the Outcast's inexplicable army of dragons.

"Yeah, he said he was one of the Chief's boys!" Or maybe people were better listeners than I thought! Which was probably even worse for me. I did the smart thing and wisely directed my glide away from the Outcasts.

"Get him!" This time it was a woman. "Offer his head to Alvin!" At that signal, the Outcast began throwing axes, hammers, and spears that they got their hands on right at me. I was glad I glided away from them earlier, all of their weapons just fell uselessly to the ground, not even able to reach me; the strongest and quickest of them were only mere centimeters away from striking my tail and that gap widened the further I went. I was glad none of the marksmen on either side were firing at me.

The smartest were a different matter. I saw several men and women, realize that breaching the firewall was futile as long as the dragons above were still up, climb down the ramps. I knew why. They were saving their axes for me. I could not stay up forever; the one downside to gliding was that, without having an updraft to piggyback on, it was a constant downward motion. Which meant that as soon as I landed, they would be there and have a much easier time killing me!

No! I still had time, I just had to think of something! In fact, why were there dragons on the Outcasts' ships?

Because my eyes were partially those of a Night Fury, I had much better vision at night, enough that I could see the dragons aboard the ship as if it was day time. I noted that all of them were tied to the masts with leather belts and rope. Now, spending time with my family taught me many things about Viking culture, but I did not need that to know that those dragons were likely captives. Maybe they were dissidents or something. Maybe I could free one of them and ask for a favor, it'd certainly beat all my other options! Except, was that?

I tightened my wings, diving downward at a steep slope. The ships appeared to be abandoned and I went fast enough that I some time before the Outcast would greet me. If nothing else, maybe I could hide underwater or something! I wonder how long I could hold my breath. I arrived at one of the ships. Thankfully for me, the bulk of the army was so indifferent toward me, that they actually slowed down the Outcasts heading in my direction. Perfect, since every second counted. I turned and looked at the dragon aboard the ship.

Flight Commander One Eye had seen better days. Yes, he might have been old and far past his prime, but I had never seen him look anything like this. I was at a loss for words on how to describe what I saw,. His wings were torn and tattered, tied securely to the deck of the ship, and covered a solid third of it; the faint imprints of boot marks gave me an idea of how they were damaged. His belt was made of spiked chains tied so tight that they dug into his scales if

he so much as breathed. One of his horns had also been sawed off, teeth were missing, and One Eyeâ€| lost his only remaining eye. And that was only the beginning, there were far more insidious and nightmarish things done to my old teacher than I had known possible. All I could do was look at the cruel iron implements and every injury with a disgusted fascination. What happened?

While Hiccup and I were getting adjusting to our new roles asâ€| brothers, he told me about the task my old Flight Commander received and about how he wanted me to rejoin him. I couldn't, not without transforming myself and causing my newfound father some measure of grief. So, I just tried to push it out of my mind, finding things to distract me.

I just never expected his mission would have ended with him in Alvin's clutches. Maybe if I had been there, I could have helped him. I knew human traps and weaponry better than any dragon; I should know, I helped make some of them for a down payment! If nothing else, my body's capabilities would have tipped the favor of any fight in our favorâ€| or I would end up just like my former master. Alvin beat me because I was so over confident, I decided to _land_.

Somehow, I got the distinct feeling that letting him stay alive was aâ€| a disservice. I shook my head, freeing myself from those thoughts. No, not the time for that. The Outcasts would be here in any moment. I had to get him free, he did not deserve this fate. I drew closer to his head, planning to undo the bindings around his head first since they were the closest.

My teacher's functional eye blinked open, as soon as I undid the chain. "Night Fury," he gasped. I backed away in shocked surprise as my old teacher's head moved in my direction. He might have been eyeless, but Knights learned to use all of their senses to peak. He sniffed at me with bloodied nostrils. I did not fight it, it would be simpler and easier if he knew who I was. Smell apparent was one of the things that stayed the name. "It is you, Night Fury."

I used my unclawed, human hand to gently touch my former teacher. "It's me." I spoke in the language of dragon tongue, apparently. So, I guess if I ever need to talk to other dragons, I know this cloak would come in handy.

The aged Flight Commander smiled, revealing the busted teeth in his mouth; at his age, it would take months before all of them regrew. He did not need to understand my words to know what I said. "That is a nice covering you have thereâ€|"

I blinked. "Uh, sureâ€|" Well, technically, I was wearing things, but none of them appeared anything. When I put on my brother's cloak, my clothing just ends up disappearing until I took it off again. Which was handy since I did not have to undress to change form. Since the cloak and my clothing end up disappearing while I was dragon, or in this case, partially a dragon. What made it more strange was the fact that he was commenting on my appearanceâ€| when he lost both his eyes.

Then I remembered, that One Eye did receive a Gift from _his_ King. While others are more cautious about letting what they received from the King be known to the public, One Eye prided himself on making others know what he obtained. Story has it that One Eye, back in his

youth, lost his eye when on an outing with a rival of his. What happened was not remembered well; some say he saved Kin from some sort of threat, others say he executed rogue and disobedient Kin. That did not matter so much. One Eye, for his efforts and sacrifices was given something to make up for his impairment. According to him, it was the power to see things exactly as they were. Apparently, it allowed him to see without both his eyes _and _to pierce the magic of my cloakâ€|

"There he is!" I heard coming from behind me. This was bad, the Outcasts had found me and by the sound of that shout, were mere steps away. Okay, maybe I could untie my master so he couldâ€|

I shook my head. No, that was not going to work, With One Eye in this state, ability to see or not, he was still effectively helpless... and he knew it, too.

I shook my head. No, there were still things I could do for my master. I undid a few of the chains binding my teacher. For a dragon, breaking free from the metal chains and belts was impossible, they were designed to give as little room for movement or any application of force; but human-like hands gave me the flexibility to just unhook the chains from their bindings. Maybe if I undid enough, my master and I could swim to safety.

One Eye said something, a solemn tone in his voice as I undid one of the last of his bindings. "Child, listen to me and remember these wordsâ€|" I only had to look at him once for him to continue. "â€|A Fang of divinity, long and sharp. Its power great, but its legend greater, can only be repaired by those with a golden heartâ€|"

I just blinked. Just, what was my teacher trying to say? "What?" I asked. This was a very bad time to become senile!

One Eye, instead of clarifying "There sits the Guardian, roasting the Corrupt One's heart. Better he should eat it himself..." That made even less sense. Who was the 'Guardian'? And what as the deal about a 'Corrupt One'? Were they names of dragons I should know about?

"Commander, what are you talking about?"

"Get him!" I heard come from behind me. It was the Outcasts, intrupting my old master's ramblings.

"I am so sorryâ€| I wish could explain to you these things. Just know what I say here is importantâ€|" said my former master. I jumped out of his way at the last second. The last remnants of his bindings were no longer enough to contain him. The old dragon jumped at the Outcasts, dragging the wooden planks that held the chains secure from the deck, and slammed right into the Outcasts as they boarded.

Immediately, I crawled away, hearing only the sound of ferocious roars and shouts of surprise. I dared not look back and instead found myself sprinting to the opposite end of the ship, the stern, I think.

It was not long before I found myself looking out into the dark waters before me, the sounds of metal clanging and fire behind me.

All I had to do was run away, jump off in to the water and hope I could swim to safety. I mean how hard could it be right? I had a tail and everything! Butâ€¦ I couldn't just leave my old master to die like thisâ€¦

I found myself turning slowly. The battle was not going in my teacher's favor. One Eye was losing ground, carefully being pushed back a little at a time. The Outcasts took advantage of my mentor's age and injuries by slowly wearing him down by making small lunges and backing away every time the elder Kin made a move. While he was a formidable warrior, weariness and injury were threats that not even the greatest could endure foreverâ€¦ he would surely lose if I don't get involved.

I did a quick search and found small pile of weapons nearby. I quickly pulled out a sword and ran to my master's sideâ€¦ only to be stagger backwards as I was stopped; my old master's tail slammed right into my chest. My old Flight Commander's head titled slightly in my direction, as if he was losing at me with his still working eye. "It looks like my tale is at an end," he muttered. "Yours is not finished yetâ€¦" He whipped me with his tail again, sending me into the water below.

For a brief moment, I was dazed, recovering from the sudden shock of entering the water. My tail steered my body upright, helping my head to reach the surface. I just had enough time to see my teacher's final act. With the last of his strength, my teacher set the whole ship ablaze in a whirlwind of flames. Outcasts screamed in agony as they were engulfed in the heat, all of them went over to cut my teacher open to stop his indiscriminate assault. It was already too late for thatâ€¦ The ship began breaking apart, taking all those onboard to a watery grave.

Maybeâ€¦ with a little luck, a little faith, my old teacher would survive. After all, fearing water and fire was a concern for lesser creatures, right? We were dragons, Kin, the greatest nature had to offerâ€¦ but steel was stronger than any normal fleshed, Kin or not. I stayed there for a moment, watching the ship slowly sink into the harbor.

"There he is!" I heard some shout, breaking me from trance. While a dozen or so had went down with my old teacher, there were still only part of a large force. Even the Outcasts that were situated in the various piers, docked around me were just part of a larger group.

Iâ€¦ did not know what to do anymore.

I could, take a chance by ducking underneath the waves and try to swim away, but the Outcasts were armed with nets and spears. Odds were, even if they all had lousy aim, one of them would hit me at this distance. I don't claim to know just how tough this body of mine was, but aside from the extra appendages, it was still mostly human. One spear or axe in the wrong place would pretty much mean a horrible and painful death.

I guess, this was itâ€¦

And suddenly, I heard a dragon's call, sort of equivalent to a human shout. More specifically, it was a Night Fury's call. An explosion

blasted one of the nearby piers, sinking it without a moment's notice. The Outcasts and I turned to look at the silhouette of the being responsible.

"Night Fury, get down!" one of the Outcasts as several fled for their lives at the mere mention or sighting of this creature. Others, the braver sorts, hid underneath their shields as an explosion detonated nearby them. Based on my experiences in Berk, a Night Fury in the night sky was a near impossible to fight assailant if you were stuck the ground. You had to be foolish or crazy or desperate to try doing that. None of these Outcasts were either of those things apparently; the smart men ran away, ahead of the rest.

I could barely keep up with this dragon; it was so incredibly fast, it seemed practically invisible even with my ability to see in the dark. I could only imagine what it must have been like to know such a dangerous creature was above you, yet you could never see it.

By now, any stragglers that stayed around had run off, unwilling to be caught in the dragon's attention. Likewise, the dragon had stopped firing his Breath, giving me the room I needed to crawl onto the docks.

I looked up at my savior as he circled overhead. If I had to guess, it must have been mother. No one else I knew had the capacity to instill fear or agility to fly like this. I mean, who else would it be? My older brother? He didn't even know how to fly.

As it turns out, there's a very big disadvantage to this form I had. Because it was mostly human with some dragon parts on it, it apparently had a human's tolerance for cold or rather lack thereof. As I climbed onto the docks, cold air hit my soaked body, giving me chills. If I had my clothes, I would at least have some protection from the elements. I pulled my hood back, returning me to human form.

Surprisingly, me and my clothes were dry, yet my cloak was wet. Then again, I wasn't wearing my clothes when I took a dunk. I just shook my head. I was at least warmer this way.

Then, I felt the vibrations of something heavy landing upon the docks. The Night Fury that saved me had landed somewhere behind me and by the sound of things it was approaching me. Which was fine by me. I owed it one; I wanted to thank the one who saved me properly. I turned around to meet the dragon.

To my surprise, it was. Hiccup. "You know, bud, I think this the first time I ever tried scaring people. I think it worked out fairly well," he said.

"Brother?" I said gawking. Since when did Hiccup know how to fly that good? Or at all? I've spend a week trying to drill proper flying technique to him and somehow he managed to teach himself in the span of a few hours. Great, it turns out I'm useless as a flight instructor. "How did you even find me?" I asked in exasperated tone.

My older brother went over to me. "I just decided to go find any huge battles. You did want to fight, after all."

I blushed. "Yeahâ€¦You're not mad at me are you?"

My older brother just shook his head. "I'm more worried about you." He lowering his side, inviting me to get upon his back. "Come on, bud. Get on."

I got on my brother, not even bothering to resist it this time. I was too exhausted to complain I was too old to ride on his back. He took off from where he stood, almost as if he had done it a thousand times before.

After the disaster I had with Alvin and the loss of my former master, I think I had my fill of fightingâ€¦ forever. I was just pathetic. Every time I really tried to impress others by proving how good of a warrior I was, I ended up makings worse. The first time was back during my first Hunt, when I took my time destroying each tower to make sure that each take down was absolutely perfect; this gave each tower more time to injury the Flight. The second time, I ended up shooting my own brother and cost Astrid her humanity. This time, I wanted to show myself to my father and to every, as someone capable of doing great things. Instead, I ended up getting my old master killed because I decided that landing on the ground was a good idea and nearly dying myselfâ€¦ I because I decided to against a foe that had proven himself extremely dangerous in a melee by making it easier for him to strike me. Iâ€¦ was a horrible warrior, it did not matter if I was human or dragon.

I looked below me, at the various Outcast ships in the harbor. Each of them had a dragon much in the same condition as my former master. Now that I knew my former teacher was amongst them, I started putting names to the faces I could recognize. I saw Cold Wraith, a Nadder who distinguished herself in the far north, lie still in a pool of blood. Lonely Watchers, a Zippleback known for their keen observation skills, had his heads impaled, one on top of the other on a spear. In total, there were twenty ships, one for each of the Knights in One Eye's Flight.

"You okay, bud?" my brother asked me.

"Not really," I muttered. I guess I should be thankful most of them appeared dead. I could never understand why anyone, human or dragon, would do something like this. "It's just thatâ€¦ Why aren't we going anywhere?" At that point, I realized that even though my brother took off, we were still hovering over the harbor. He flew us in circles, close enough to the ships to observe them, yet far enough away to not be in any serious danger.

"Oh, nothing really, I was just thinking on how I wanted to force the Outcasts to leave my island," said my brother.

~ !A!A!

Oh, how I waited for this day. I'm no stranger to seeing Berk on fire, but this time, I was the one responsible. Funny how it all turned out. When I was a mere boy, I had thought about how I would lead the Hooligan Tribe to glory. I dreamt up battle plans for how each and every pillage was to be conducted, had visions of how to best control trade. I was the perfect fit, born to lead and conquer; I had the will and the intelligence to do so. If I had been made Chief, we would never had to worry about dragons or enemy Tribes ever

again. It was my rightful destiny!

Instead, I was cast out, set out to sea with nothing but the clothes on my back and my favorite hatchet. A long time ago, I had been betrayed by the one I had called my best friend and cast out of the Tribe, denied of my rightful place.

Yes, I did wrong all of those years ago. I disobeyed orders and in doing so, let my oldest friend's father die. I never intended for any of that to happen, but what was I supposed to do? Join an obviously losing battle? The entire village block was on fire with no ways in or out! I would have died if I stayed my ground! At least, he would get to go to Valhalla as a great warrior, I was not ready yet. Back then, I regretted my actions and worked desperately to clear my name and each time, all of my peers turned from me one at a time. No matter how much I worked, no matter how much I sacrificed, they never seemed to care. It was all that damned one eyed ancient's fault.

But that was years ago, I got over it. In fact, I have learned to take it in stride. I was no longer a Hooligan, I was an Outcast and we were enemies. As an Outcast, I _had the right _to take revenge upon my enemies. I wanted them to suffer, not pay a measly fine _to them._

For a while, I had almost forgotten that ancient dragon, right up until he showed up on my front door.. Back then, I was just beginning my experiments with the magical spear I held in my hands. I had just finished getting several of my most loyalâ€| and not-so-loyal warriors used to flying back then. Little did I know just how vitally important having a solid chunk of my men being dragons was that day. It was especially amusing to have Savage deceive that senile, old fool. We captured that one eyed Nightmare and whatever dragons stayed to defend their leader. It was as if the gods were correcting a grave error they made oh, so long ago. As such, I decided the best way to honor them was to give them a little bloodâ€| one drop at a time. They should savor it just as much as I had savored his pleas to spare his little servants.

When I had first started leading Outcasts, I had thought it would have been impossible for me to lead a small band of misfits to take my revenge. I would have needed to use subterfuge or clever planning to take on Berk; the Outcast Tribe was many things, but endless was not one of them. Now though, I could ignore traditional military doctrine, that was for people who could not rule the skies!

And it was all because of that boy. Strange how I thought he was only good for a ransom and a small bit of payback way back when, but now I knew just how valuable he really was. A boy who was so gifted in to esoteric and technical was a resource, the fact that it would eat Stoick for the rest of his days was just icing on the top. Still, throwing Stoick's youngest off a cliff without him having any way to resist it was going to be the highlight to evening. Luckily, I kept those arrows back when I first captured him, alongside his brother. Who knew they were more than just ordinary arrows?

I had the power now to do as I wished and what I desired more than anything to right what had been wronged. It only cost me something oh so unimportant as being wholly human. And that was before finding my spear.

My spear might have magical uses, but it could still be used like an ordinary spear. I charged through the two girls blocking my old rival, holding my spear forward. Both of Bertha's sorry daughters jumped out of my way, giving me a free chance to target Stoick.

As surprising as it was for my old enemy to stand up and fight after being struck by my spear's magic, he was still struggling to keep himself standing. He was not fast enough to duck out of the wayâ€|

But he did not need to be. The Nadder, female, I could smell threw a flurry of spines in my direction, forcing me to back off. Meanwhile, both of Bertha's daughters turned their attention and tried to lunge at me through the back. I threw my spear around in a wide arc, forcing one of them to back off.

The though instead slid under my attack and tried to slash at my legs. A jump was all I needed to do to evade thatâ€| and a jump was all I needed to make my counter. I drove my feet downward at the girl, planning to crush her sorry little bones in impart.

She rolled out of the way, letting my feet leave an imprint in the dirt. Within that same roll, girl shifted into a crouched position and began rapidly hurling herself against me, screaming and flailing her axe like a madwoman! Each of us traded blow for blow, all recovering it recovering within moments of being woundedâ€| It was fortunate for me that the others were not as involved. "Ha! Look at you," cried her twin. "Go get him, Astrid, he's nothing but a son of a half-troll! Make him pay for Ol' Toothless!"

I instinctively drew my own axe and parried the girl's blows. I remembered this girl way back when I destroyed her little axe. Back then, I knew she was strong, for a girl, but she was nowhere near as ferocious as she was now; I do relish the opportunity to break people even more. And given the gleam of her eyes and the faint coat of scales by her shoulder, she was more human back then. She must have been like me, another one empowered by that nameless tonic.

The Nadder then lunged in and blew a jet of flame, scorching my backside. It was not going to kill me, but it was still annoying and somewhat painful to experience burned. I hurled my spear at the Nadder, who parried it with a flick of her tail at the right moment.

While I was distracted, Snotlout and the other girl lunged in, each of them throwing insult after insult as they pummeled my side.

I gritted my teeth, suppressing the pain I had taken. I could feel my injuries healing as my body slowly transformed to compensate. Granted, all I could really feel right now is that my wings had gotten biggerâ€|

Stoick meanwhile drew both of his swords and took advantage of the opening the children gave him. I hurled my hatchet at my old friend, only to have him parry my blow and to trust his spare sword into my gut. I staggered backwards, pulling the sword out. I screamed in sheer agony as I lifted the sword from out my intestines.

Discarding the blade, I contemplated my options while the other combatants closed in. It was five-on-one and the odds still were in

my favor, but only if I turned their own numbers against them. I could not fight all of them at the same time, but maybe I did not have to. All I had to do was fight_ one of them_ to defeat _all of them. _

My eyes turned to the boy, Stoick's nephew, if I recalled. He clearly was not wholly human, but I knew for a fact it was not my spear that changed him. He was another one of us, changed by that same potent beverage. The others were all very defiant and willing to engage in combat, all of them out for my blood. The boy however appeared to be quite hesitant of me, outward appearances aside. I think I should take advantage of thatâ€¦

Putting my axe aside, I charged at the boy, through the opposing crowd of warriors, dragon and human alike. I shoved them aside as I focused on my prize; any pain I would take I would recover from anyways. The boy was ill prepared for my charge as I grabbed and crushed his right arm. He howled and pain as I dragged him away from the rest of the group. They pursued me, their weapons drawn and ready to fight.

"Not so fast, Stoick!" I yelled, causing them to stand at an arm's length away from me.

"Let him go, Alvin," said Stoick. "He's just a boyâ€¦"

"â€¦And he's Snotlout," said Camicazi. Stoick gave the girl a cross look. "What? He's not exactly the best hostage to pick from if you ask me."

The Nadder however was not deterred. "I do not care for him in the least," said the Nadder as she approached. Strange how it was I could understand dragons, but I guess that's what I get for being halfway there. "Do with him as you wished." She was about to lunge at me, but both of Bertha's annoying girls stepped in her way, stopping her in her tracks. She clearly must have been someone whose parents I threatened or something when I made her join up for her to hate me like that. Sometimes forcible recruiting never worked out the way I intended, but oh well. I guess I will do as I wished.

"Hey!" cried my captive.

"Don't!" cried one of the girls.

I threw the boy a small distance away, far enough away that his allies could do nothing to do save him, yet near enough that I could do what I wanted. He tried to scurry away, look for a way out, an escape plan of some sort. None of that would save him of course, but I enjoyed giving him an extra few seconds of a head start.

Hostages were good and all, but I did not want him able to just run away or fight back. No, I had the option to get more get more value from my hostage while I demoralized my enemies. If I just killed him, then and there, I would have only taken out one of them from the fight. Since he was going to still be alive, my enemies would try to escape with him, that means I face far less resistance. Besides, I wanted to know when you tried to change a boy who was already part dragon.

I levied my spear in the boy's direction, unleashing the torrent of

flames with an act of desire alone.

"Snotlout!" cried Stoick.

The flaming serpents I summoned chased the boy, outpacing him in the blink of an eye. There was no escape. The flames all then writhed as they concentrated and tried smother the boy in their warm, unnatural embrace.

But that did not happen. Instead, the flames immediately died out moment they got too close to the boy. For a moment, I wondered what exactly was going on. This never happened before, why now of all times?

The boy noticed what was happening a few moments later when he suddenly fell down and tripped. For a moment, the boy shrieked out in startled surprise before realizing the flames were not touching him. I saw him reach into a pouch by his belt, pulling out a glowing stone. "It worked! It really works!" he declared. "Nice fireworks you have there." And then suddenly the flaming snakes that I had been sustaining with my will instantly disintegrated, ending my spell.

I think I was not the only one amazed. My enemies were all struck dumb founded by what exactly happened. Never once did I ever have anyone successfully fend off my spear's power and it was clear that the stone in the boy's palm was responsible. Where did that boy get a stone like that? Did Stoick's little disappointment fashion it for him? or did he make it himself? Maybe I should take him to find out. After all, his arm had still not fully recovered and Stoick and his forces were not close enough to bother me before I could do something more permanent. I think I could settle for taking him.

I approached the boy only to be stopped by another one. I had seen him earlier, resigning himself to the sidelines. Now, however, he stood in my way. "Get out of my way!" I barked.

The boy simply shook his head. "No, I can't you let you do that to my host."

I just snorted. He might have been tall for his age, but all he had on him was a tunic and some poorly fitting trousers. "Hah as if one measly boy can stand between Alvin the Treaterous and his kill! Look at you, you don't even have a weapon!"

And then the boy took off the jeweled necklace. Where a boy once stood, now was a Monstrous Nightmare, one of the largest I had ever laid my eyes on. Its scales reminded me of a particular one stuck to the bow of one of my ships. "I have plenty of weapons," stated the Nightmare. "All ready to destroy you the moment you lay a paw on him!"

It was at this time, I also heard a few explosions off the distance. Dimly, I could see my ships being taken apart, one at a time by a figure out in the distance. It had to be Stoick's boy, being infuriating as always. This was bad. I did not have enough forces readied to take the whole island, I had only planned to lay siege enough to force Stoick to hand over his kid. Without a means of escape, we would be forced into either surrendering or dying in droves.

And Stoick knew it.

"It's over all, Alvin," said Stoick as he approached me, backed up by a wall of teenagers and a dragon. "Looks like I'll be taking even more ships from you."

I backed away from him, looking at the sky. The dragons overhead had stopped firing. Likely they ran out of shots, which was good for me.

With a six-on-one fight, with one of my greatest assets not working as intended, and with most of my forces that were able to make it topside on its last legs, I knew could not win this battle, not by a long shot. I dashed off away from my enemies, into a cloud of fighting men, using them as a buffer to slow down my pursuers. "Alright, you sorry lot, it's time for us to go. Leave any and all dead weights behind!" I shouted. Only an idiot would not know when to retreat. I guess it was just as well, battle weariness was starting to set in.

The gods were ever so fickle.

But was not it so strange? That boy took off his necklace to return to human form? Last I checked, didn't men and women have to don animal skins to change shape? Yet, why did he have to do the opposite? That was interesting.

* * *

><p>The one weakness shared by all naval craft was that if anything breached the hull it would inevitably sink if nothing was done to stop the water from flowing in. This made plugging up holes and sealing hull breaches one of *the* most important tasks in any boat. Thing was, I could make really big holes now. I blasted a hole into one of the nearby Outcast ships, immediately causing it to sink into the docks.

Three down, seventeen to go.

"You know this is all strangely familiar," laughed my brother. I internally smirked, we both remembered how we met. "We should sink more of them."

"Wait, not yet," I replied.

"Why not?" complained my brother

"Because we want them to leave," I said. Good, my plan was working.

The Outcasts may have had plenty of warriors, but in total, those numbers would be dwarfed by all of Berk, especially since many of them ended up dying when their island was taken. They could make a quick attack and make off with some plunder, but they could not take the whole village or the whole island. If they stayed on Berk for too long, they would be stranded and be at the mercy of the locals. My plan was simple, I would simply sink a few ships at a time to make it clear that they had already stayed for far too long.

And it seemed like it was working. I heard the sound of horn blaring,

signaling the whole horde that the raid was over. I took a look at the mass of Outcasts running down the ramps while simultaneously getting a look at the dragons that flew right over me and to distant horizons.

With my job done, I decided it would be time now to retuâ€¦|

"Hiccup, I see Alvin!" shouted my brother, interrupting my train of thought. I immediately turned my gaze downward to see the half dragon, Outcast Chief board a ship, shoving several Outcasts into the water before immediately ordering the ship to leave, stranding dozens of men who were about to board that same craft. "We have to take him down, now!" called my brother as I circled around the boat as it went out to sea.

For a moment, I considered it. From here, just above the Outcast fleet, I had a clear shot of taking out Alvin, once and for all. Even better was the fact that none of the Outcasts seemed to notice me, just yet. All it would take is a well placed hit to the side of the hull â€¦| or maybe to Alvin himselfâ€¦| but, then again, would any of those things actually work? Alvin had survived explosions before and well, I think he can probably swim too. At best, those things might just end up causing him to get stronger or something. Did I really _need_ to kill him?

Then, Alvin spotted me. He grabbed hold of the spear held by Outcast's hands and threw it at me. I simply turned, evading the spear. "I will be back!" yelled Alvin. "Next time, I'll lock you in a dungeon so deep, so dark, you'll suffocate!"

"Get him!" cried my brother. "You heard what he said, we have to take him down,_ now!_"

In response, I drew what remaining power I had left in my lungs, coalescing the firegas and heating it to temperatures that would melt through most metal. And let it go.

The explosion was only slightly larger than what I could normally manage, but it made a splash that obscured the vision for a few good seconds.

"Did we get him!?" asked my Toothless, right before the water subsided.

Alvin and his ship remained unharmed, the draconic Chieftain having his a metal shield covering most of his body. Toothless and Alvin were both hit by an expression of stunned surprise, neither of there quite expecting me to do this.

"No," I replied. "I'm not going to risk losing you." And then I turned tail and flew us back home.

It took my brother a moment to recover from the shook. "But we had him!" yelled in disbelief. "We could have stopped him, finished him, then and there! We-you could have been a hero!"

"I don't care about being hero!" I snapped, saying words that I never thought I would ever say. It wasn't that I didn't want respect or admiration, it's just thatâ€¦| I don't want to risk losing my family or friends. If I were to fight Alvin then and there and I died,

Toothless was going to be held at Alvin's cruel mercies. I would never forgive myself if I did thatâ€¦ "Toothless, we have to go homeâ€¦"

Toothless nodded, devastated. I think he really wanted to beat Alvin. Hopefully, he'll cheer up eventuallyâ€¦

"Hey, is there any room-" shouted a voice from coming behind us. I only had to glance to see the head of a Zippleback trailing behind. Barf and Belch approached us as soon as I flew over the docks. The skies were clear of other dragons, save a certain Gronckle.

"-in your home-" said its twin.

"-for us?" completed the duo.

"I guessâ€¦" said my brother, hesitant. "I mean what about going back to our King?"

"We don't exactly have any place else to goâ€¦" Meatlug hovered a bit further behind, her rapidly vibrating wings keeping pace with me. "Weâ€¦ saw happenedâ€¦ with One Eye."

Toothless stayed silent, yet I could practically feel the sadness dripping off of him. I vaguely remembered One Eye. I knew he was my brother's mentor in the same way Gobber was mine and that he was sent on some dangerous assignment to capture some rogue dragon called the Usurper. Although, did that meanâ€¦ Alvin was the Usurper. But, if One Eye was hereâ€¦ "All of his Knights are deadâ€¦" said my brother breaking his silence. I think I now understood why my brother wanted me to slay Alvin. And this was just when I thought I was doing the right thing.

Meatlug stayed silent, nodding. Toothless, I think

I landed by the cliffs where I had last seen my father. I did not have to walk far to find him with my friends and family stationed in a nearby house to heal their woundsâ€¦ plus two dragons, who were both of them former prisoners in the Kill Ring. The only person who was missing was Gobber. The Nadder sat down in a corner of the room, a faint smile, if it could be called that, dawning on lips as Camicazi and Astrid groomed and dressed her wounds. I think I also smelled a bottle of perfume being passed around.

The real surprise though was finding the Nightmare who kidnapped me two weeks prior in the same room as my father while my Dad was pouring mead for the dragon. Did he not realize this was the same dragon as in Kill Ring? And how didâ€¦ oh, I guess that explains why that boy had Meatlug's necklace.

"Uh, sorry about, you knowâ€¦" said the Nightmare as he approached me.

"Uh, don't worry about itâ€¦" I replied. It'sâ€¦ utterly bizarre, even by my standards, to be nonchalantly talking to a dragon who ended up kidnapping me as if it was not a problem at all.

By now, father had taken notice of me and brother. He immediately jumped out of his seat and hugged me and my brother. "Hiccup! Toothless! You're both alive!" It was as if he was trying to declare

the fact we existed to the whole of Midgard.

"Dad," My brother and I coughed. "Too tightâ€¦" I'm still never going to understand how my own father could crush my chest despite the fact I was several times larger than him. I managed to catch a glimpse of Fishlegs as he and Meatlug reunited in a hug.

"Parents receive a Plus Twenty to Grapple Checks," said Fishlegs, summing up my plight. He was a bit bruised but overall fine. "I wish I had that kind of advantage when dealing with the twinsâ€¦" I grinned a toothless smile.

"Well, I wish that all that fighting lasted longer," said Ruffnut as she looked into Barfâ€¦ or was it Belch's eyesâ€¦ yet another staring contest.

Tuffnut was apparently doing the same with the other head. "Yeah, no one invited us to the siege until it was over. That's like the lamest party ever." Trust the twins to treat an invasion or raid as if it was a bad party for not lasting long enoughâ€¦

Surprisingly, the twins were completely unharmed, save for the bruises they already had on them from the earlier day'sâ€¦ festivities.

"Heh, you should have seen Hookfang and I!" said Snotlout as he took a swig of his mug. "We forced Alvin back!"

"Or the fact there we had heavily outnumbered Alvin," said Astrid, likely not even bothering hiding the fact that she was wellâ€¦ changing. She then stole my cousin's cup and poured the entire contents over his head. The Nightmare, which I guess was now named Hookfang, only smirked.

"Well, I am glad than some of Alvin's own were willing to defect," said my father. He clearly did not know. He backed away, showing us the lines of human skin slowly turning into a coat of scales. "Unfortunately, quite a few Vikings are going to have some really rude awakenings once they manage to wake themselves upâ€¦ I wish I had that spear Alvin had so I could drive it right through himâ€¦"

'ARE YOU GOING TO BE ALRIGHT?' I wrote to him in a nearby, discarded plank of wood on the floor. Berk after any siege would have plenty lying around, mostly to end up being burned or whatever.

My father simple shrugged. "Well, I'm not doing too badly, I feel. I'm still just getting scales, most of the others, well, they're already losingâ€¦ or worse, gaining limbs." He laughed about it a little, "Guess I'm just too tough for Alvin's magic." I smirked, well, that was as good a reason as ever as far as I was concerned. Nothing slowed or stopped my Dad, not even powerful curses. Still, it was unsettling to learn I was not going to be the only person on Berk to change. "Course, I wish I had that cloak of your's," laughed father as he looked over my brother's burned cloak. "Because then I could just take it off to stop being a dragon."

My brother though still seemed rather listless, but thought I caught a brief glimpse of a smile creep along his face. "Dadâ€¦" said my brother sniffing. 'Dad', not 'father', but 'Dad'.

"Uh, is something wrong, son?" said our father.

My brother looked at me, wanting approval for what he was about to say. I knew what it was about.

"Dadâ€¦there'sâ€¦ something you have to know... about meâ€¦" Meatlug and Fishlegs also approached, an amulet in his hands. The twins and the Zippleback were still locked in a gaze, not really caring about anything else; Hookfang and Stormfly paid attention but they did not step forward. "And my friends."

"Oh, you mean the poor Vikings Alvin cursed with his damned magicâ€¦" Dad said. He clearly did not know the true. "Well, I know some of you have those little trinkets to return you to your truâ€¦"

'THEY'RE NOT VIKINGSâ€¦' I intruppted by writing

"Are they or Romans or Frenchmen?" Our father asked. "Well, I guess some Mainlanderâ€¦"

"They're not Romans or Frenchmenâ€¦" said my brother.

"Northern Wanderers?" exclaimed Dad. "Those Feather-People Bigjob claims to have met?" Bigjob being the Hysteric Chief who set sail to a fictional land called America years ago, but of course since a place like America can't exist, the Feather-People can't either. It's easier to fall off the Edge of the World than to find people by sailing Westâ€¦unless that Sun Chaser story was trueâ€¦"

"No, Chief, the former live too far North and the later don't exist," said Fishlegs.

"Then what are they?" exclaimed my father.

Fishlegs asked the Gronckle. "Are you sure about this, girl?" Meatlug only replied by licking the boy's check. He placed blanket over the Gronckle, covering her body before giving her the amulet. Within moments, Meatlug had become human again, the blanket concealing her modest.

My father was stunned, he spent a day or so interrogating the girl during my capture. "You? But you've been in the village for weeks! Why do you have an amulet that returns you toâ€¦ Urgh, was Alvin in league with that traitor of a sales sailor?" All of that came with the implied question, 'Are you a spy?' Technically, she was, but not for Alvin.

"No, Dad," said my brother. "It's more, complicated than that."

"Sir," Meatlug explained. Acknowledging my father's authory seemed to call him downâ€¦ slightly. He gave her a nod of approval, allowing her to continue. "Theyamulets, they, do return to human form, but rather they allow us to assume itâ€¦"

"What are you saying?"

"Because they're dragons!" exclaimed Tuffnut.

"Even _we _figured that out!" Ruffnut added. Both of them were still locked in a four-way staring contest with a two headed dragon.

Meatlug confirmed them. "Yes, it is trueâ€¦ Those of us who came with Trader Al and the Night, we are dragonsâ€¦"

My father was stunned silent by this revelation. These were people who in the past few weeks have been neighbors and visitors to our home. To find that they were truly dragons was world shattering. With a good chunk of the village growing scales and losing limbs, it was very likely people would be able to figure out the big secret we've been hidingâ€¦

My father's hands immediately pulled out his sword as he made his way to Meatlug. Dragons were to be killed on sight and Meatlug had just confessed to being a dragon. The Nadder squinted her eyes, ready to take initiative in the case of the fight. Snotlout and Hookfang were off dozing, too dead to the world to notice. The twins and the Zippleback were _still _in a staring contest.

Astrid and Camicazi got in the way of my father, but he shoved them aside

"Dadâ€¦" said my brother. His actions were almostâ€¦ mechanical. He lifted the sword above the Gronckle's head, ready to strikeâ€¦

"What is it, son?" my father said in monotone.

"Whileâ€¦ I am human, the truth isâ€¦ I never knew that until very recentlyâ€¦" said my brother, tears rolled down his eyes. "I wasâ€¦ hatched from an egg, taught how to fly, how to breathe fireâ€¦ I was raised as a dragon, doesn't that mean you have to kill me, too?"

My father's hands shifted to my brother automatically. He did want to do any of this, but that was the law put into place generations ago. I placed myself in between the two of them, if there was going to be anyone hurt, it was going to be me. I did not want my family to destroy itself, not here, not now.

"Get out of the way, son!" my father yelled, his voiced killed with both anger and sorrow. "I have to do this!"

I wrote this on the floor, signaling for the first time my defiance of him. 'WHAT KIND OF FATHER PUTS THE LAW BEFORE HIS SON? MY BODY IS THAT OF A DRAGON, YOU HAVE TO KILL ME, TOO!'

The sword dropped to the floor as did our father. It was not his body that was defeated, rather it was his heart.

* * *

><p>I had indicated before that dragons, particularly Knights had their own Gifts, special powers that were given to them by their King. I just never had elaborated much or displayed this concept except once.

Some of you might already know about Alvin's little back story from the show. I've actually thought to incorporate it and surprisingly it works really well given what I intend to do with him.

24. Chapter 24

****Disclaimer: Dreamworks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****Well, this is the last chapter in this part of the story. I know a couple of you were upset by the sheer number of crazy things happening in the previous one, but that was pretty the only way I had to drum up a climax. Also, note that I've actually been planning on throwing all of those into the story sometime, but I realized in the planning phase that the best way to accomplish this was to use them all at once to lead to this chapter. It might not make that much sense to you, but it's actually important that these things all happened all at onceâ€|****

****Yes, this chapter is the last one, for this story. No, I am not abandoning the fic, but rather I have decided to make this story a duology.****

****Edit: Changing Allegiance, the Sequel is already up.****

****For the meantime, please read and review this chapter.****

* * *

><p>The world does not look like what it used to be. I have been Chief on Berk for nearly twenty years and a Viking warrior for longer than that, but never have I really seen magic being done on the scale I saw. Up until my son started changing because of his practice of sorcery, I had only really thought that sort of thing happened in far off lands or in ancient timesâ€| or whenever Gothi wanted. But even then, I thought than the cursing of my eldest and my nephew was just a one off incident, some rare occurrence that was just only due to really unfortunate luck. I did not need to worry about itâ€|<p>

That illusion was shattered a dozen different ways by the events of last night. What could possibly be more chaotic than my worst enemy finding an enchanted spear that turns people into dragons, that the old man no one likes to think about had a staff that throws lightning, and my youngest wearing a cloak that turned him into a Night Fury?

Toothless why didâ€| No, don't think about it. It's not his time yet; I have more important things to worry about, more important things to do.

I'm not the only one whose life has been changed because of the things that happened last night. Thousands of proud Vikings lost their livesâ€| or their humanity in Alvin's attack. While we have come out ahead, there was still the matter of damage controlâ€| and affording punishment for wrong doings done. It was up to those of us on the Council to ensure that things went their best, just as they did with my elâ€| No, not yetâ€| Made up of representatives and leaders from all of Berk, the Hooligan Tribal Council is the primary governing body, responsible for maintaining and interpreting the Law, organizing resources, and ensuring the protection of our townsfolk, among other things. As Chief, I was the head of it.

Hours ago, we've already setup the orders for rebuilding, specifically focusing on the infrastructure such as the loading ramps and the harbor. Rations were going to be given out to those in need, while those who were displaced are to seek shelter with friends who were more fortunate. Any other concerns would also be brought to the Council for consideration. Of course, that policy meant that the entire Great Hall was filled by desperate and fearful people, waiting for answers and solutions to seemingly impossible problems.

And that was the simple part, the part the Council did this every time the dragons showed up 'Hunting', according toâ€¦ No, not right now. Strictly speaking, the Council had overseen Berk's many, _many_ reconstruction efforts since its inception. That made us very experienced and very used to the idea of rebuilding.

What made last night's raid special was that we needed to conduct hearings take care of theâ€¦ unusual problems caused by last night. Often, the Council does not have a trial every Berk gets attacked, we don't always capture prisoners and dragons can't defend themselves in courtâ€¦ until today.

The remnants and stragglers of Alvin's failed assault marched noisily out of the Great Hall, their iron bindings affording them nothing but a heavy burden and a harsh punishment. Most of them were human, but every now and again loyal warrior managed to ensnare some dragons. They were all Outcasts, no matter what their bodies were. Most would end up _mercifully dead_ from a variety of executions and while the _unlucky few_ would end up in prison and likely starve to death this coming winter. There were enough mouths to feed on Berk as it is, adding more prisoners was just a liability and a drain on resources. That was what the whole Council decided for them and I did not disagree with my peers.

"Next!" cried a voice by the entrance. The Outcast trial was done in a jiffy; their sentences were practically already decided for them the moment they set foot on the island. It was easy to decide what was to be done then.

Next was a bit more ambiguous. A familiar old man was being led in by two younger and larger men. Mildew's case is a bit different. While there is no penalty for practicing or hiding magic, I was not bringing him here for that; throwing a boy off a cliff was punishable by being thrown off that same cliff, throwing the Chief's boy should be punishable by something far more imaginative. "You have been brought before this Council for treason, how do you plead?" asked one of the guards bellow.

"How do I plead?" scoffed the old man. "I did not commit treason! That boy was a _dragon_, a demon was not fit to live among civilized men." I gritted my teeth, restraining myself just enough so I that could only glare at the old man. "You should have tossed them out when you had the chance, now it's spreading like some kind of plague!" Men and women, those far less informed but still valued members of society, gave concerned sounds, each muttering and fearing the possibility that they might change next. Feeding off the crowd's fears and worries, Mildew spoke with damnable authority. "You need to put them in cages!"

"I agree!" shouted a man in the crowd.

"If you don't," shouted Mildew, "They'll destroy the village."

"That's enough," defended the Council members. All of us were fed up with his incredulous claims. She pointed out to a crowd of dragons stuck into a corner, trying to hide themselves from the fearful mob. Not everyone who came to seek the Council's guidance was human and those who were the first to awaken from Alvin's spell definitely needed it. "We cannot forget these dragons are still your neighbors and familyâ€¦ As such they should be treated as such." Her words seemed to calm both the scarred crowd, both the human and dragon elements.

I stood to address the crowd, hopefully the presence of their Chief would help settle things down. "Look, Mildew, if there's a problem I'll deal with it."

"Oh, there is a problem, Stoick. And I think I speak for everyone when I say you better do something about it," said the old man. "In fact, you're practically part of the problem already!"

"I'm still a man," I replied. "I'm still the Chief." I don't know what exactly happened, but unlike everyone else who was struck by Alvin's spell, I suffered the least. Whereas everyone else had already finished transforming into dragons, the only proof I had that I was under the influence of that spell were the faint lines of scales that grew whenever those flaming serpent burned into my flesh. Maybe it was because of the effort I put into forcing myself to fight against Alvin or maybe I was just too strong for the spell.

"But for how long?" Mildew countered. "A dragon can't be Chief!"

"Your concern is noted," said a Council member in a monotonous tone. There was a reason we built his house so far away from anyone else, none of us felt like really dealing the with the old man right nowâ€¦ and the original reason why he was brought up before the Council seemed to have been promptly forgotten. He was supposed to be facing charges for attempted murder, not questioning my legitimacy of all things! I sighed internally, I suppose I had enough on my plate as it was, I could let go of Mildew, for now.

"You are dismissed, Mildew," I said, wearily. "I recommend you stay home for a whileâ€¦" and not get involved with clean up effortsâ€¦ at all.

"Fine, I suppose I will then. Better that than to live amongst all these beasts!" snorted the only man simply as he was escorted out.

"Mildew and magic, well, it's not like we could be more frightened by him anywaysâ€¦" muttered Gobber from right by me.

I could only nod. "We'll see him in a week or so, when things hopefully settle down and with hopefully less people around to make a fuss."

"Next," cried the man by the entrance once more.

I sighed, reading myself for this last hearing.

From near the entrance several figures made their way forward. Most of them were teenagers, but not all of them were really as they appeared to be. Some of them were born, others were hatched. Two, maybe three dragons followed behind them, depending on how you counted Zipplebacks. My sons, accompanied by their friends made their way. Except for the Zippleback, those who were truly dragons set foot inside the Great Hall in human form.

While the other two were somewhat easier to set my mind on, this last one was troubling, bringing into question everything I had ever known about dragons. For as long as I could, I have kept my mind off from last night's talk I had with my sons. They did not tell me everything, I imagine, but that was still far more than I think even Bork the Bold ever dreamed.

From them, I learned that dragons were not mindless beasts who just flocked over to human villages because we had so much food everywhere. No, dragons attacked settlements because it was sporting, which was often the same reason that we Vikings often raided settlements. Dragons warriors would recount favorite battles against powerful adversaries as much as Vikings would their own epics. Glory and honor were valued just as much as the spoils of war. It is really telling when dragons thought of us mere men as a Herd where as we thought of them as mere beasts.

Dragons had a structured, organized society where members fulfill certain roles. They have their own warriors, healers, gatherers, and laborers. They did not have things like say blacksmithing, but that's more of the case of them rare really needing to make their own tools than outright stupidity. Instead, they focused on the arcane and the mystic, with it being considered a badge of respect rather than fear to have even one unusual ability. They never explained how they got it, but I imagine that they would tell me in time. Trader Al, Ruseclaw, as one of the 'Flight Commanders' apparently had many such 'Gifts', among one of those special powers was the ability to bestow the power to turn dragons into men into jewelry.

But most alarming of all was what they didn't tell me. I'm not an idiot, at least not most of the time. Toothless claims to be my son as well as Val's, yet he was born in an egg. Now, unless he was lying something happened to Val all these years. Now, I was waiting for them to tell me, but not once did either of my boys make any mention of her fate. I could be wrong and being overly cautious of course. I mean, it's not like Toothless hasn't lied to me to me before. It's very possible that Val's perfectly fine even though Toothless came out as an egg. That must have been a very odd pregnancy.

The crowd assembled by the firepit parted, making way for my sons and their friends. All of them were anxious, waiting for the proper declarations to be made.

Toothless walked into view, shivering and muttering in the smallest voice he could manage and I could barely hear "Maybe they'll banish me." Hiccup promptly gave him a look and put his wing over him. "Thanks," he sniffed. It's almost sad to realize how close those two had become in such a short amount of time. I've heard stories about how bad Hiccup the First had it with his siblings. They were brothers their whole lives and just ended up fighting each other for some

reason or other.

"Toothless, Hiccup, approach you may approach," said Gobber. They did so.

"Look, Father," Toothless said, his tone uncertain and full of confusion. "I just want to say that I'll willing to accept whatever punishment you have for meâ€¦ I know that what some of us have done might constitute as treasonâ€¦" The crowd muttered, this was news to them. Aside from myself and a select few, none knew the exact circumstances of said treason.

"Eh, quit your babbling, Toothless," said Gobber, blowing off the lid off of the surprise. He knew about the big secret, as well as my plans for it. "It's actually pretty goodâ€¦"

"Thank you, Gobber," I muttered. That just only made the crowd get even more excited. After all, treason sounded like it was being rewarded right in front of them. Well, I came prepared for such an occasion, all I needed to do was say the right words, "Of course, associating with criminals is in itself a crime and Trader Al's deceitfulness still brings up the question your friends' loyalties, but your friends have proven their innocence when they cut their ties with himâ€¦"

The former Nadder and the Nightmare, no, Stormfly and Hookfang, both stared at me, unsure of what to make of the scene. Meatlug's body seemed to tense up at the mention of the traitor, but she held firm. Conversely, Barf and Belch, alongside Tuffnut and Ruffnut, seemed to be somewhat disinterested, only here because the others were here. Meanwhile, others, humans, both partially and formerly, all gave me confused looks. Toothless spoke again, "But Father, what aboutâ€¦ the dragons, about One Eye andâ€¦?"

I held my hand up, silencing him. "Yes, I know, you lots only really worked with Alvin and Trader Al because your old mentor was involved and it was against your will. They were forced into becoming dragons and only because of those amulets that that blasted _Traitor _Al gave them that are even able to return to your true forms. But they proved their true allegiances when the first thing they have did was to fight your former captorsâ€¦ I only regret that your old master had to die a warrior's death. As soon as we could, we will ensure he is properly buried as a warrior deserversâ€¦" I knew I was outright lying and creating an elaborate and confusing story that would fall to pieces under sufficient investigation. While I was certain people would hold this against me if they ever found out, the truth sometimes isâ€¦ inconvenient. After all, Odin is named the Oathbreaker for a reason; oaths should be broken when the proved too inconvenient such as the time he cheated a Giant out of the Sun for rebuilding Asgard's walls. Though, I was not exactly lying about wanting to meet my son's former teacher; maybe an old warrior like him might help me understand this whole messâ€¦ Did Odin select valiant dragons as much as he would valiant men?

"â€¦Butâ€¦ butâ€¦?" stuttered my son. Internally, I was laughing; I bet he was so confused right now, wondering if I decided to omit last night's conversation from memory. A lesser man might have, but I am not a lesser man. The crowd seemed to be buying it, their cries of worry and confusion being replaced by those of approval.

Hiccup gently rubbed his nose in his brother's check, calming him with the assurance he was there. I kind of wish Hiccup could get involved, but they couldn't speak Norse anymore and writing just did not affect groups the same way. Same issue with the Hoffersons' pride and joy; I really wanted to address the whole mess of breaking in the Kill Ring and 'liberating' all of the dragons there, but I think that might be better settled in private some other time.

"Which brings me to my requestâ€¦" I spoke to the dragons, both former and current, "You are all experienced with flying, breathing fire, and likely other dragon related subjectsâ€¦ I wish for you to teach my Tribe to come to terms with their condition. What do you say?"

Meaglug, Hookfang, Stormfly, Barf, and Belch turned their attention towards each other, each of them muttering and cawing at some sort of a decision. When they were done, Hookfang turned and spoke these words to me, "We accept."

Good, everything was going according to plan. "Then, I name you as friends and allies of the Hairy Hooligan Tribe. I know that you will be vital to aid us in the future." That caused the crowd to erupt into a chorus of cheers, excited to know that such potentially valuable allies were on outside. Normally, a feast would be in order, but now was not exactly the time of it. I also had no doubt some of my sons and their friends might get involved to aid them and that fine by me.

The dragons, both those who were human or not, all bowed, making minor pledges with the phrase, "On my Honor." I nodded. Who knew dragons had honor?

I approached my two sons, going around the firepit. Both of them were obviously very perplexed at my actions. I bet neither of them were expecting their old dragon slaying extraordinaire of a father to just so easily twist the political scene for what should have been some trophies by the fireplace; I sure didn't. Maybe if circumstances were different, I might have been thinking about this whole thing like a normal Viking should have, but there was nothing normal about any of this. A few months ago, I would have probably disowned my only son if I so much as thought he was associating with a dragon; now I had a son who is a dragon and another who _was a dragon._ "Don't think I have forgotten about you. I have a task for the two as you, as well."

"Uh, fatherâ€¦" stammered Toothless. Hiccup pushed his younger brother forward as I went to meet them. Toothless seemed to be still somewhat dazed and was not able to move forward.

I put a hand gently onto his shoulder. "While our new allies are helping our Tribesmen cope with their changes, I charge the two of you working to undo themâ€¦ Effective immediately, Council has decided, the two of you are to learn what you can about sorcery and use that knowledge to treat the afflicted." Ever since my eldest had come back, I had not really had time to tell him about the Council approved him to practice magic on his own, there was just too much in the way. Toothless also seemed to have the same talents as his brother. Now that it seemed more or less essential, it might have been the right time for it. The crowd gave concerned mutters, but I did not care.

Toothless looked at me for a split moment. His face was filled with the look of book eagerness and uncertainty. Clearly, he wanted to prove himself, but he was having the creeping doubt that failure was inevitable. "Uh, yeah, dad, I won't fail youâ€|" he replied.

Hiccup on the other hand seemed more confident. He was far less conflicted, yet had the same willingness to fulfill the assigned task. It was not that he looked like he was certain he could do it, but rather he looked like he was willing to try. He bowed his head, the only thing he could do.

"Good, I'm counting on you both. You best better get started. Now, off you go." I said, sending my sons and their friends away.

I think I might have gone mad. After all, I was trusting dragons, our mortal enemies since Vikings first sailed to Berk to aid me in my time of need. Not only that, I am outright making up some sort of story to let them stay on my island and then offer to give a proper funeral to what should have been a fanciful story I would share over a good mug. For all intents and purposes, I should have disowned my two sons and exiled them along with all of their friends, dragon and human alike; everyone who was involved in that mad conspiracy of theirs should have been left at the mercy law with their treasonous crimes exposed. Instead, I was placing my village in a situation that a sane Chief would have feared above all elseâ€|

No, I was still sane, I was simply unafraid. Traditions are challenged in ways that have never been considered before, long held beliefs have been proven untrue.

I didn't want the world to change; I was perfectly happy with the way things were. I was the Chief, after all, practically at the peak of my life. I was the one on everyone's lips and dissent was easily taken care of. My name is known throughout the Barbaric Archipelago and my enemies know to fear it. Sure, I can say that the issues I had with my son were rough, but I can't really say that I was not content living as I was.

But things change, lives are lost, lives are transformed. I now live in a world where one's current form was not an indicator of what they were born as. Certainty of allegiance can no longer be to determined by the absence of wings and tails, not when they can be so easily concealed. How are we supposed to tell dragons apart from men when we could change form?

I am neither blind nor too afraid to realize that. Lesser men would have covered and fought their way; I am not a lesser man. I will be the first to admit to accept that the strangeness and oddities around me are a fact of life. But in spite of all this, there was little I could really do about it; All I could do is trust my boys and their dragons.

Maybe, trust is too strong of a word; maybe I just need to keep an eye on them. Dragons were dragons after all, no matter what they looked like.

* * *

><p>I was shopping with a dragon. Not how I ever envisioned

spending my time, but I suppose Camicazi and Stormfly were be good company. As soon as we left the Great Hall, everyone just went off on their own groups, mostly to start figuring things out given the tasks we'd been assigned; Camicazi and I decided we'd show the former Nadder around Berk. More specifically, a clothing store to get her something nice to wear, a welcome present and something to help make up for having her locking her in a cage for about a weekâ€|

That, plus I wanted to get as far away from Snotlout as possible, he had that look on him whenever he got any ideasâ€|

"What are theseâ€| fabrics?" said the new girl as she gently glided her hand over a small, thin sheet of soft white cloth.

"Oh, that's silk," said Camicazi. "It make really fancy clothes, nice and soft. Never get to wear them much, so expensive and they get torn up so easilyâ€|" I imagine that as an Heir, Camicazi often had the option to purchase silk items if she wantedâ€| or more likely, she just 'finds' it. Silk clothes, I heard fetched quite a sum.

"Yeah, expensive because few people know where to get it." I'm not much of a silk person myself, but I do hear stories about a road where it constantly gets delivered to the merchants.

"Oh, it might be too expensive then." muttered the dragon as she put the silk sheet back where she got it. Dragons may not have used coins or had property, but I did know they had something that qualified for an economy, only it revolved around fish.

"You can get it if you wanted," I offered, taking the sheet of silk and giving it to the girl. I could practically hear Camicazi's grin. She might not understand what I was saying, but I think my actions spoke for me.

"Uh, are you really sure about that? I mean, you both have said it was rather expensiveâ€|" said the dragon as she took to bundle away from me.

"Yeah, Astrid, you have been saving up for a new axe for some time now," added Camicazi.

"I still have an one, you know. And it's not like I'll be able to use a new one to before I lose my hands anywaysâ€|." I barked before toning down my voice. "Sorry." I did not realize it until after the battle how many hits I took. I was just so angry at Alvin that I did not care about protecting myself if it meant I could hurt him more. Several large swaths on my body grown bluish-gray scales. Chances were, I might not stay human for very long, meaning buying that axe I was saving up for would be a waste. So, I figure I might as well use what I have for something.

"Maybe not the whole thing, thenâ€| maybe something smaller."

"Oh, maybe a scarf then. Something to keep you warm for the winter," said Camicazi, prompting the dragon to nod.

"That's fine," I replied. "Go with whatever you feel like, Stormfly."

"Thank youâ€| Astrid," said the dragon.

"Well, what are friends for?" It took me a moment to register what I had just said. Well, not really friends, but I felt that I could trust her.

"Friends" whispered the dragon. She was having the same thoughts I was. "Is that why the others were so willing to take names?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Meatlug got hers because Fishlegs saw a man hauling meat and he had to come up with something. And Barf and Belch were in a burping contest."

The Nadder shook her head in disappointment. "Somehow, I wonder how they would have ever gotten into the Knighthood were it not for their relations."

"Oh, do tell," stated Camicazi.

"Well, I came from a rather unimportant peasant family. I worked hard to earn my position, to make a name for myself to bring a little respect to my ancestors. The Knighthood offered the highest respect, so I aimed for it," said Stormfly. "Now the whole Flight is dead and now I have to redeem their honor."

"Well, you can go back you know. Your King did not strike me as someone who would refuse you" I offered automatically. Now though, I couldn't help but feel a little disturbed. While, we both came from relatively different backgrounds, the Nadder coming from what must have been the draconic equivalent of a poor family and I came from a well off Clan, we both had plenty of the same motivations. I wanted to avenge my uncle's honor, she wanted to do the same for her flight. I really hope she does not turn out to be a long lost sibling like someone who should not be named. Although I think I got over much of my beef with him after Odin knows how many times I jabbed Alvin in the stomach.

"No, I can't, not as long as our enemy remains. The Usurper, this Alvin, will die. I hope you will help me in that."

* * *

><p>I'm awesome, there's no doubt about it.<p>

Who was the guy who kicked Alvin off the island? Me! with a little bit of help from my new partner. I decided to call him Hookfang because of his canines, it's so much cooler than some boring name like Toothless.

Still wish I had the book. As soon as the Outcasts left, Astrid asked for it back. Humph, no doubt going to hand it back to Hiccup or something. I would have done a better job at using it, but whatever, I didn't need it! I had other, more important things to do with my time.

Like get a date with Astrid. I mean, come on, I was the hottest guy around. I was there, took a beating from Alvin, defeated his magic, and then scared him away! That's gotta' count for something, right?

Now I just got to find her. She was standing here a moment ago.

"Where did Astrid go?" I asked Hookfang. He might have been a dragon pretending to be a guy, but hey, at least he could make for a good wingman. Well, he had that duty my uncle gave him, but that couldn't be that important, right?

"Iâ€¦ don't know," he replied in Norse. Strange how those little amulets the twins had with them made dragons look like that. Not as impressive as a runestone that wards against fire, but we can't all be as awesome as me. Tuffnut gave me one of them this morning, something about not needing them today for some reasonâ€¦

I just shrugged. "Keep looking," I said as I took a few steps forward into some alley way. Well, at least that'll give me some time to think up of some pick up lines when I finally meet Astrid. She was the only gir...

"Oh, hey there, tall, dark, and handsome!" I heard a voice say from behind me. It was a girl's, I think, someone roughly my ageâ€¦ and quite interested by the sound of thing.

"I heard you were quite the war hero, facing down Alvin last nightâ€¦" said another voice. Oh, of course my reputation precedes me! I have fan girls after all.

Quickly I turned around to greet my fans. Sure, I was planning on making Astrid my queen, but I can't just ignore my admirers, now can I?

Instead of being greeted by my adoring fansâ€¦ I found two girls, both of which in age grabbing hold of Hookfang. "My, you're so strong," commented one of the girls.

"Uh, thank you, I uh, work outâ€¦" said the Nightmare. That traitorâ€¦

"Hookfang, we have to find Astrid!" I snapped.

Hookfang, rightfully, had a look of breif shock appear on his face. "Uh, maybe some other time ladies, my host needs me!" he yelled as he crawled out between the two girls.

"Aw, don't follow that killjoy..." pouted one of the girls.

"Yeah, you can stick with us! You can be my boyfriend!"

"Hookfang!" I shouted, grabbing hold of his arm.

"Sorry!" shouted the dragon.

"Hey!" shouted the two girls. I took my companion, the traitor that he was, and ran off faster than the girls could keep up. It only took a minute or so for me to lose them completely.

"Uh, sorry about thatâ€¦" muttered the dragon.

I glowered, causing him to grin a little. I was upset and he knew it.

I don't believe it. I've been trying to get the attention of girls ever since I was ten and I got were a few jabs to the face whenever

I'm near Astrid. Hookfang shows up and immediately two girls show up out of nowhere and ask him to be their boyfriendâ€|

That is so not fair.

Maybeâ€| I need aâ€| less good looking wingmanâ€| or to lose this snout of mine. And the hornsâ€| they might not be as cool as I thought they wereâ€| But hey, only the strong get to be Nightmares, right? That's what my Dad started saying at any rate and it was one hundred percent true!

"Hey handsome," I heard a voice say from behind me. I turned to find another girl approaching Hookfang. I sighed, when will the injustice end? First my cousin, now my wingman?

* * *

><p>'I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! AFTER LAST NIGHT, EVERYTHING CHANGED FOR ME! '<p>

"I can only imagine," I said, writing down my client's condition. He was fidgeting, finding it hard to keep still. I was somewhat surprised that he could still write legibly, given his condition, but he was persistent about it. All he needed was just a bag of flour and we could understand him perfectly.

"It's not too bad," said Meatlug. "You'll get used to it eventuallyâ€| "

While everyone else took the day off and tried to get things sorted, Meatlug and I decided to spend what was left of it meeting some of Alvin's victims. We wanted to know what we were dealing with by combining the knowledge and expertise gained from two different worlds. Human to dragon transformations were something that I don't think either humans or dragons studied often, but I imagine that between Meatlug and myself, we could make a difference.

'I DON'T WANT TO GET USED TO IT!' wrote our patient. Unfortunately, this was one of theâ€| odd cases.

"Now, calm down," said Meatlug. I saw her almost bend over to lick the unfortunate Viking, but she held back on the last moment. "You aren't going to make things better for yourself whining like thatâ€| "

Our patient hung his head dejectedly, defeated. He wrote again. 'THIS IS JUSTâ€| WRONGâ€|HOW WILL I FEED MY FAMILY NOW?'

I cringed. Among the five victims we have interviewed so far, all of them have brought up food as an issue. Since most dragons lacked an equivalent of hands, many Vikings suddenly found themselves out of a job. This patient though at least had one advantage compared to all of the others. "It's not all bad," I said, "You don't have to eat nearly as much. That saves youâ€|thirty five percent on your food budgetâ€| "

"Daddy! I'm home!" we heard a little girl yell from down stairs.

"And your daughter is accepting of you, that has to be a plus,"

stated Meatlug.

'THAT JUST MAKES IT WORSE,' wrote our patient.

We heard footsteps, the little girl was climbing the staircase. She was not long.

Our patient hung his head up in sadness and shame. 'THANK YOU FOR COMING TODAY, BUT I THINK MY DAUGHTER NEEDS ME'

The little girl ran up to our patient, moving quickly past Meatlug and myself. She was giddy with excitement and with one deft motion picked up the little dragon from his chair. The Terror gave a small yelp of surprise as it all happened, but appeared defeated as he was held in his daughter's arms. "Let's go play!" said the little girl as she ran down the stairs with her now diminutive father

I am no expert, but I can imagine that being turned into a Terror was probably the most humiliating thing that man had ever gone through. Most of the others ended up turning into something larger and notable; most people don't exactly hand Terror heads on their walls. There were probably a dozen other Vikings, all of them suffering in the same way. The only ones who had it worse were the ones turned into Whispering Deaths. Losing all of their limbs, their eyesight, and having to rely on sound and smell to function left them very frightened and confused. I'm just glad no one turned into a Snaptrapper or a Zippleback. Considering the fact that the only multiheaded dragon I knew turned into two separate people, I would not want to imagine what it would be like if someone did not have an 'other' half.

"We should get going," I muttered as I closed my notebook.

"We should," agreed Meatlug as she walked down the stairs before me.

We left the Terror with his daughter, not feeling inclined to get involved further. That was probably a job better suited to someone who was not me.

Still, that was six down, over a few dozen more to go; Alvin had changed plenty of Vikings in his attack. None of them were taking it really well and were uncertain about their fate before the Chief reminded them there were still legally Vikings. I wonder how long it would take for them to adjust though.

My thoughts were interrupted when I noticed Meatlug was humming some tune I did not recognize. It was sweet, almost like listening to honey given musical form. Meatlug stopped when she noticed me, giving me a smile.

"Hey, what was that?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing, just thinking up a tune to set a song to," she replied. "I have to memorize his story, so that I might sing it in the future..."

"You could just write it down" I said. Only a moment too late did I memorize my mistake; dragons did not have reading or writing. Like many ancient Vikings, they apparently had a tradition of bards

to remember everything in a song form; which was what Meatlug was trying to do.

Meatlug smiled a bit sheepishly. "Well, maybe I just"

"Don't what?"

"I don't see a point to it" she said, backing away, her cheeks blushing. "I am sorry, it's just I admire the knowledge you shared with me when I stayed with you, but it all just felt empty, meaningless"

"Can you explain?" If I recall my memory correctly, I read to her some books, mostly things like the Book of Dragons and a couple of those strange and arcane things involving 'science' and 'math'. She seemed to enjoy them when I read them, but I did not know this was how she felt about it. Was she only pretending to like them earlier?

"Yes, how is it you're supposed to tell others about it? How are they so supposed to listen and remember your words, the stories and sagas you create?"

"You don't" I said, a bit confused. "I'm not writing a saga or a poem I'm just listing the facts. They could just read what I write, they don't have to listen to me."

"That sounds strange" said the Gronckle. "Others don't need people like us to remember things for them?"

"Well, kind of, but someone has to write it down for them" I said.

"But where's the joy in that? Kin come near and far to listen the bards sing."

I nodded. "Same with us Vikings, too, but we don't need our bards to sing about everything."

"...I see..." said Meatlug, as she took a seat on nearby stone. "I just wished to understand why you and Toothless are fascinated by these books, but sadly I knew less than I did before."

"Well, part of the joy of reading and writing is doing it for yourself," Immediately, I took a seat by her, opening up my notebook to a blank page near the back. I took my charcoal pen and began writing the runes to my name. "'My name is Fishlegs,' that's what I just wrote. It's a very simple statement, but I can add more to it if I wanted to, maybe make a story out of it or just list out some facts about me" I don't really know if this is the best way to get a point across, but I don't exactly know.

Meatlug seemed to contemplate that for a moment. Hopefully, I was getting to her. "Can you write a story for me?" she asked.

"About what?"

"Just some words" she said.

"Um, okay," I said, getting my pen

"'My name is Meatlug.'" she said and I put my pen to work. She paused for a moment, causing me to look up at her with anticipation. She went close to me and took a glance at what I had wrote; I think I caught a glimpse of a smile. " And I think you're â€¦ cuteâ€¦"

I heard my pen fall on the ground.

* * *

><p>I should have been named 'Useless', because that's what I was. I was a socalled prodigy when I was growing up, the envy of my peers. I had shown great enough promise my King called to me directly and told me of what he wanted to do with me. Yet, that was a lie. I was just a scrawny boy who only really knows a thing or two about hammering metal. In fact, I was even terrible at being a dragon, the very thing I had spent my whole life doing and being praised for; I probably deserved being forced out of being a dragon for a second time!<p>

And to make things worse, I am completely unreliable. I have nearly killed my only friend and older brother â€¦ and sent my master to his death. Last night, I thought that maybe...I did not have much more left to lose. My own father should have known how much of a pitiful disgrace I was, rightfully sending me to exile. Instead, I was given a quest, an objective, one so critically important that he was outright lying in front of the whole village!

How was I supposed to go and do what my father asked? I barely knew enough of reading to comprehend a few dozen words used every day, but anything outside of that, or worse, in another language was completely out of question. How was I supposed to undo a draconic curse?

"We're here, Toothless," said my older brother as he began his descent. It wasâ€¦ strange how good my brother was. It had only really been less than a day of him actually flying and already he was among the most agile fliers I have ever seen. He had spent a whole week gliding under my tutelage, but yet he never really flew until I was out of the way. I guess I'm bad at teaching people about being a dragon, tooâ€¦

We arrived at that sinkhole Hiccup found a while back. Both of us wanted someâ€¦ alone time after last night's events, so brother recommended we go to a place no one but us really knew about. He also brought a small wooden barrel along for the ride, clutching it between his paws as we left. What was in it? I had no idea.

I got off the moment Hiccup stopped flying. "I'm still embarrassed that I have to actually ride on my older brother to come hereâ€¦"

"But if you did that, I would have had to spend an hour waiting for you." said my brother in a smug tone.

"Yeah, you would have die of boredom," I burst with a light chuckle. Well, yeah, flying was so much faster.

"Well, I would have gotten to go to paradise. The only one who get to

go there are men who died fighting, women dying in child 'birthing', and the unfortunate few who died of boredom," said my brother. He talking about Valhalla, of course.

"And I don't think I would have been far behind you, bud," I added. The joke had still not worn its welcome, keeping my brother and I laughing for a moment longer. We both knew howâ€¦ stupid and dumb it was, but neither of us really cared. We just wanted to one up each other and add more to the sheer inanity for the joke.

"Well, I think I'll go build a fire, before this joke bored me to death. Stay here," said my brother as he left me for a moment.

I sighed. Well, that was fine by me. I needed to go do something myself. My brother was not the only one who brought something on this trip; I also brought a woven pack with the Berk crest on it, another hand-me-down.

I opened up my pack and pulled out the cloak that was originally intended for my brother. Holding it in my hands, I could still feel the soft yet vibrant energies that flowed through it, disarrayed and damaged, but still pulsing through. It isâ€¦ strange being aware of such details, but I don't really question it. It still had power, that much I could tell, but in its current state it could only turn me into a dragon only part of the wayâ€¦ not that I deserved that anyways. I only hope my brother can forgive me for what I was about to do. It was his, after all.

I pulled out a pair of scissors. Because of my foolishness, I ended up getting my master killed, something I had hoped I would never do. The moment I thought I was invincible, I ended up causing more problems! Right now, it was next to useless to my brother and I. My brother was already a dragon, making the cloak redundant for him and the damage it had taken made it unappealing to me. Yet I knew that my brother and I would eventually have to study the cloak, figure it out and maybe even restore it to working condition. Iâ€¦ did not want to be tempted to put it on again.

Opening the scissors, I moved them over to the cloak. I was sure that it was made of cloth, I wouldn't need anything more than to eviscerate it completely. I don't want to be a burden or cause more problems for those around me. It's better I get rid of this before that happens again. At least as a small boy, I don't cause as many problemsâ€¦ Maybe, I should leave, too; maybe, I was just one big mistake. That way, I can't cause anyone problems at allâ€¦

"Toothless," I heard a voice call from behind me. It was Hiccup.
"What are you doing?"

"Hiccup!" I yelled, dropping my scissors before I could cut the cloak. "Er, nothing," I quickly tried to lie. "Didn't you have to build a fire?"

"Well, considering that I can breathe fire, I don't think I really needed to spend too much time stoking itâ€¦ why do you have your cloak, Toothless?"

"Uh, no reason," I tried to say, but I gave up when I realized it would be too late. "Look, brother, I have to destroy this thingâ€¦

"

"Why?" he asked. My brother approached me. "I get that it's damaged, but that doesn't mean you should destroy it."

"No, it's just thatâ€¦ I don't think I can use your cloak without hurting othersâ€¦ and maybe I am too dangerous myself." I said. "It's better I destroy it before I cause more problemsâ€¦"

"I know the feelingâ€¦" said my brother as he sat by me. "Did Dad and I ever tell you about all the times I tried to bag you and mom?"

"Well, sort of. I know that you failed." I said. Why was he bringing this up?

"Yes, but did you ever really know about how bad all of those failures were?" said my brother. "I often ended up maiming or otherwise harming others in my quest, with the last person being you and that's just when mom showed up; no one wanted to be around me during the testing phase, either. No oneâ€¦ really likes to talk about those days, no one liked my mistakes."

I cringed. I knew of my brother's failures, but I think this was the first time I really knew about what happened every time he failed. He had spent what must have been years harming others. "Did youâ€¦ kill anyone?" I asked hesitantly.

"No, mostly, I only ended up bruising or knocking out people for a few days, sometimes I wounded their pride other times I just wounded them," my brother sighed. "But I had done it for long enough that people thought that I was a big mistake." Now he was starting to sound uncomfortably familiar.

"â€¦ But you're not," I said. "I don't care what others think about you, you're still my brotherâ€¦"

My brother gave me a brief grin on his face before immediately licking me on the checks, telling me by his actions how close we were. "And so are you," he said, in a firm and calm tone. "It doesn't matter what others think, just remember I will still care about you."

It only took me a minute to realize that he had thoroughly manipulated me, tricked me into saying what I did just so he could follow it up with his rebuttal. Heâ€¦ really knew what I was going through and he wanted me to know he was with me. "Uh, thank youâ€¦ Hiccupâ€¦ I needed it." I said. I put my cloak away, maybe I shouldn't destroy it thenâ€¦

"No problem bud," said my brother as he went back. He rolled the small barrel over to me. "Oh, and before I forget, could you open this for meâ€¦"

"Uh, sure," I said. The barrel was small, but not so much that I could lift it in a single hand. When, I twisted the lip open, I noticed an odd seafood smell coming from inside the container. It was familiar, but I could not place my finger on it. "What's inside?" I asked.

"Guess," said my brother, a tone of mock play.

"Well, it's obviously foodâ€|so is it some sort of fish?"

"No," said my brother. "Just look for yourself."

Removing the lid, I noticed there was a cooking pot inside. I removed it, revealing for what appeared to be rocks underneath. Whatever they were, they were the source of the strange odor. And then it clicked, I knew what it was. "Oysters!" I said. "They're oysters."

My brother did the closest a Night Fury's face could imitate a smile. "I thought you could use some cheering up, bud, so I got some for you."

"Uh, thank you," I said. I had not had oysters since I was fledgling, not since, well, Hiccup knows. Ever since Mom became a Knight, she never had the time to go fishing for them like she used to, and I became too busy on my own to fish for them specifically when I got old enough to get my own food. And ever since I got to Berk, I often gravitated towards trying the foods I never even knew existed. Now, I began to wonder... would fried oysters taste better than I remember them? Already, I was starting to feel a little guilty for my actions earlier; my brother was too nice to me.

"Hey, what are older brothers for?" asked Hiccup. "Well, other than making their younger siblings feel uneasy."

* * *

><p>Toothless was a bit better after I gave him a that little surprise. It seemed, he was quite fond of fried oysters, despite never having them in what must have been years. My words and actions seemed to have had an effect on my younger sibling, causing him to stop beating himself up and act a bit more cheerfully for much of today.<p>

That all stopped once night fell. My brother started to fall apart when our Dad got up to the temporary podium set up by the docks. Gothi and Gobber stood beside him. "We are here to honor our fallen," he said in a tone that was so impossibly calm and emotional. "It does not matter who they were or where they came from, all that mattered was what they did. Everyone here is a hero in my eyes." _Toothless then broke down into tears, holding onto my body tightly. He was not alone, though; I was with him.

Beside us were some of our friends, none of them appeared to be having the same problems as my brother. The other dragons were not as shaken by the whole thing or at least, not as shaken on the outside. Meatlug in particular seemed to be rather interested in the whole ceremony with Fishlegs informing her of any important details. Stormfly had a white silk scarf and was wearing a very odd, obviously made up hair style I could not find the words to describe, but Camicazi did. Hookfang was surrounded by a bunch of fangirls, much to Snotlout's chagrin. Andâ€|the twins and the Zippleback just sat there paying attention to the whole scene.

I doubt any of my ancestors would have ever believed a night like this would ever come. For the first time sinceâ€| ever, dragons were being honored and respected on Berk's shores. More specifically, dead

dragons were being honored and respected on Berk's shores the same way fallen heroes were.

Surrounding dad was a throng of villagers wishing to mourn the losses. The reconstruction may have only just begun, but we Vikings wanted to make sure our fallen were taken care of. There were shouts from a few Vikings, men who decided to praise the fallen for their valor. They were only drowned out by the sounds of those who were on the verge of tears.

True to my father's word, several fishermen, including Bucket and Mulch, fished out the bodies of the dragons strapped onto the wrecked Outcast ships in the harbor. While the majority of Berk villagers did not know anything about my brother's former teacher, save his name, they did not really need know much else to honor him. He took down, in his last moments, a superior enemy force and bought time for a retreating noncombatant, a 'proper' way a Viking should die in many people's books. It seemed odd to me that we yanked his body from the bottom of the harbor only to send it off in a burning rowboat, but I did not make the rules. Why it did not count when he took a dozen Outcasts along with him was beyond me; I guess people wanted to make sure he was honored the 'proper' way.

As a result, he and the bodies of two of his former Knights were strapped to the deck of some old rowboats that barely were large enough to contain their forms without sinking preemptively. They were not alone; the bodies of humans and other dragons joined them.

Many Vikings were affected by Alvin's curse last night. While many of them survived since they were kept out of the fight, there were plenty who ended up taking severe injuries because they were either in or too close to the fighting. The specifics were not important, but many ended up dying, either a full bodied dragons or as twisted hybrids, their forms forever frozen at the moment of their death. I could only hope they arrived in Valhalla.

I am no stranger to funerals; I was born and raised a Viking and dying in the line of combat was an occupational hazard, whether it be against dragons or men. I would like to think I kept my cool, that was I was standing strong in this time of need.

But I don't think my brother had had any of the same experience. Tears came streaming down his face as if he was an overflowing dam. He was clearly trying to keep a straight face, but still failing. "Don't be ashamed," I said calmly. I put my wings over him, attempting to conceal him.

Toothless wiped off his face once he realized what I was doing. "Thanks," he sniffled. He still shedded some tears, but I think the majority of them had already been spilled.

I had to be there for my younger brother, it was my job, my responsibility. Out of everyone who I have ever met, I think he was the only one to ever look up to me before. Never have I ever known anyone who was so willing to follow in the things that I did. While, I might have given him reading and blacksmithing lessons, he was quite eager to learn more about them. Sure, I learned some tricks like flying and fire breathing from him, but I don't think it was for the same reasons. I did not want to disappoint him, like I did so

many others.

We both turned our attention back to father, who was now listing off the important deeds and details of some notable Vikings. Like Stuckhook, once took down a Nightmare in an incident involving soap and an exotic fruit called a 'cantaloupe', or Limebeard, a member of a winning team in some boating race a few years back. Dad listed off facts and achievements, one after another. To our surprise, he did not give the last one himself, "And lastly, I would like to call my youngest son forward. Toothless, do you have anything to say about your old master?"

Toothless looked shocked for a moment. He gave a glance at me, wondering what he should do. "Go ahead, I'll be watching you," I said as I nudged him forward with my nose. He was hesitant at first, looking back at me wondering what I was thinking, but once he got on the stage, it seemed all of his worries seemingly vanished.

"Come on, son," said our father. "Is there anything you have to say?"

"One Eye was someone I had known for practically my whole life," said my brother in a solemn tone. His worries only seemingly vanished, after all. "He was close to mother, Valhallarama as you know her. The old man gave help to us whenever we needed it he gave me lessons for some of the things I learned, like hunting and swimming... and last night, he gave his life for me."

In brief instance, I suddenly found myself hearing voices and imagining myself in a different place. I was suddenly aware of the frigid air, the harsh cold, and a soft white blanket of snow lining an overturned rowboat in the middle of nowhere. My vision blacked out and the image of that place stayed with me. Yet all I could hear were the voices having a conversation.

"Leave me alone, you beast!"

"Pardon, Ma'am, but I am merely curious about why a beautiful, young maiden is out here in a place like this."

"Get away!"

"And I will, but first, let me give you something."

"A deer carcass? Why are you giving this to me?"

"Well, I understand that your kind prefer fish, but I don't think you can afford to be picky. Especially if you're going to spend time keeping that egg of yours warm."

"No, why are you helping me?"

"Does it matter? You are amongst Kin now."

"Who are you?"

"Heh, I have had many names over the long years, but the younglings like to call me One Eye."

"Hiccup!" I heard a voice say. It was my brother, breaking through

the wall of voices running through my head. Immediately, I shook myself free of the vision, bringing myself back to Berk. "What happened? You were just staring at me for a minute.

"More of Mom's memories," I told him. "The King really did a rush job on me." I did not have to think twice before realizing it was another one of Mom's memories, though I was glad I was not being completely sucked in like last time. Still, it was somewhat enlightening to know that One Eye helped Mom in her time of need. She was not alone; she had a complete stranger help her.

"Really? Well, you didn't miss much," said my brother, a slight tone of satisfaction was in his voice. "It feels good to say goodbye to him in this way." I'm glad to have known him." said my brother.

At this point, we both paid attention to Dad giving closing speeches before ordering the boats would be sent out to sea. One at time, each boat had its moorings removed, letting the tide pull each ship out without any human guidance.

Once they were declared far enough, archers and marksmen from above struck each ship with burning arrows, sending them alight. One at a time, each boat would sink when the fires damaged enough to let water in. A sizable majority of the mourners present ran down whatever surviving piers there were, hoping to get a better view of the small boats as they were engulfed in flames; my brother was along them.

I almost ran to join him, but the crowds of people were simply too fast and too tightly packed for me to get by. I almost laughed, for the first time, I was actually worried about running someone over. I sighed, I wanted to join my brother, to stand by him at this side, but I don't think he really needed it. I shook my head. No, this time, I think he needed to be on his own. It was his moment; I did not want to ruin it for him. I backed away from the throng of people, resigning myself to simply watch from a distance.

I sat down some distance away. The boats were still burning out in the distance, but one by one, I could tell the fires were getting extinguished.

Someone, I did not expect moved over to me. It was Astrid. "This spot taken?" she asked as she sat beside me.

"Well, you just took it, so yes, this spot is taken." I replied. She grinned a little. It was good to finally talk to her, instead of having to write something in the dirt. Ever since my rescue, I haven't had the time to really sit down and chat with one of the people whose opinion of me I valued over most others.

"Things have been hectic, haven't they?" she asked. "I mean, you've got a brother, you're well, this"

"You just gestured to all of me," I said, laughter almost seeping out of my voice. This prompted her to giggle somewhat as well.

"And you've made yourself a mortal enemy. Overall, I'd say you've done more than most other do in their entire lifetimes."

"Because earning the enmity of one of the most dangerous people in

the whole Archepelgio is such a valued achievementâ€¦" I sighed. Sometimes, I wished I was still the boy who was always fruitlessly inventing and failing to live up to the standards setup by his culture; it was far simpler than this.

"Hey, that's nothing to sneeze at," she said. "But, I do have to wonder, what are you going to do now?"

I thought about that for a moment. There wasâ€¦ a lot on my plate.

I obviously had the task my father gave me and I still wanted to learn how to turn myself back into a human, even if it meant turning back into a scrawny boy. I tried one of the amulets belonging to the Barf and Belch, it did nothing except give me a minor headache. I suppose it was obviously going to be much harder than that. Trader Al had been around for longer than Mom had beenâ€¦ well, Dead Wings, so I figure she might have tried using them to return to human form once she found out about it. Obviously that did not work, since, if it did, I might have ended up growing up with a little brother all this time.

But more important than that was solving the utter, confusing mess that was my family. I don't think it's a mere coincidence that my everyone in my immediate family except my father ended up being a Night Fury at one point or another. Even more bizarre, was the fact the Old Wrinkly, my grandfather, had a Night Fury cloak in his basement, one that turned my brother into a dragon. That's something that cannot have been mere coincidence. Another thing to consider was the fact thatâ€¦ there had to have been more Night Furies than Mom. There's been Night Furies since Bork the bold's time, always leading raids, yet Mom was the only one in the King's service. Why was that?

Perhaps the only thing just as strange as the stuff on my mother's side of the family tree was the stuff on my father's side. How was _Snotlout_ able to use the book, yet neither Camicazi nor Fishlegs could get it to work for them? Or even better, why were Toothless and I able to invoke that strange brand of sorcery in the first place? Why was my Dad still mostly human, when everyone else hit by Alvin's spell was already fully dragon?

There wasâ€¦ something I was not getting yet, something important. One thing was for sure, I had to figure that sort of thing out. "Well, I think I can sum it up in a single word, 'crazy', or even better, 'insane'," I said. "Because that's only thing that can sum up this whole situation."

"Definitely," agreed Astrid. "Looks like you got your work cut out for you."

"Oh, yeah, definitely, because anything else would have been too easy for meâ€¦"

"Then, I think you'll need this," said Astrid, a smile dawning on her face. She might have change somewhat, but her smile was still the same. She opened her pack, revealing a familiar black scaled book. "Had to 'convince' Snotlout to hand it over, hope you like it."

I took the book from her hands and set it down beside me. Toothless could take it home with us once he was done; I did not want to risk

damaging it by handing it with my claws or teeth.

"Thank you, Astrid."

"Hey, what are friends for?" she stated almost nonchalantly.

It was then I realized something else. Not so long ago, I had wanted to prove to others that I was worth their time, that important, valuable, not a burden; one of those people was Astrid. I mostly forgot about it when I changed my priorities to just trying to survive Alvin or getting the whole village to stop trying to draw an axe everytime I went to get groceries, but I did not realize until now that I had achieved what was one of my original goalsâ€¦ Well, maybe I was still a bit of a burden and not all that important outside of being the Chief's son, but it seemed Astridâ€¦ valued me, or at least approved of me enough to call me her friendâ€¦

Iâ€¦ was not expecting that. I did not know what to do. Astrid struck one of my forepaws, bringing me back to reality. I yelled in surprise. "That was for what I owed you over the past two months," She said, a small smirk on her face. I guess now that I was fully a dragon, there was no more worry about me transforming even more. Still, it stung and I used my other paw to try to get some get feeling back into it. Astridâ€¦ then went over to my neck andâ€¦ did something there, some sort of scratching motion combined with a tight squeeze by my chin. Immediately, I went limp, every fiber of my being was suddenly hit by a sudden rush of euphoria and relaxed pleasureâ€¦ What did Astrid do to me? "That was for everything else." she whispered. Meatlug showed me that trickâ€¦ whatever it was.

I tried to get up, tried to move, butâ€¦ everything just felt so good, like I could sit and lie down forever. I was still able to think, but ooohh, was it all so distracting. Was I purring? Astrid really had an odd way of showing her friendship to other people, but if she could accept an odd freak like me, who am I to complain?

Now, I was not alone; Now, I had friends.

* * *

><p>I am glad to have made it this far. I have been planning on doing this for over a year and things have seemingly have come together to form these events. Were it not for the support of those aiding me, I probably would never reached this far, my plans would have lain stillborn, uncompleted. For that, I am grateful towards them, my Kin.

You seem surprised. Were you expecting someone else? Oh, yes, Honored Guest, I am addressing you, you seem to be quite surprised. Within my Domain, nothing escapes from my Gaze, whether they be the visitations of beings such as yourself or the whims and dictates of Fate. My Guest, I assure you that no harm will come to you; you need not fear for you are outside of my reach, though you are **_here **_**within my domain**_**. **_**The nature of the Metaphysics confound you? Do not worry about such things, it is not important for you to know. Come, stay, look around if you so desire.**

**Yes, it is I, the only so commonly refer to as the 'King' or 'Lord'. I take that you wish to know about me if you came all the way over here. No, I will not tell you my name, such things are best left

unknown as of yet. There is power in names, the Egyptians wisely knew to value them so. I do not wish for you it any more than the peasant girl. Only those who are the most loyal to me know of my name and of my origins. It is especially improper since you seem to be unable to give me yours; it is only fair.**

It is unfortunate that one of my greatest Flight Commanders have perished without any record for what had transpired other than the power I had Gifted him with returning to me and the frightened and confused cries of the peasantry. Most likely the Usurper was responsible; my awareness Outside of my Domain is limited to only word of mouth. Regardless, it is imperative that I destroy him, both as a matter of security and as a way of avenging my loyal Knights. Perhaps I shall meet One Eye again, in this life or in his next.

Still, without his Knights, I am unable to recreate his position without weakening the existing Flights. Though, they are faithful and loyal, recent events have shaken them, my Guest.

Ruseclaw's Flight is not geared towards combat and is more reliant on infiltration to achieve his missions. Though I frown upon his tactics, I do not doubt his zeal, few Kin I have ever met have willing to go to such limits to prove themselves. Perhaps, it might have to do with his lineage? Some things, even I do not know. I do however wish he would not focus so much in trying to salvage his reputation among the Herd. Word of mouth of his involvement with Dead Wing's children has unfortunately made things difficult for him.

And of Dead Wings, herself, she has been anxious these past few days. The meeting with her children and their rebuking of her had shattered her once unbreakable confidence. The news of Flight Commander One Eye's death only served to push her ever closed to the abyss. She attempts to make up for this by pushing her Flight to its limits; each member training constantly in every art and technique they knew without stopping. It is already to the point that that the Kin under her authority are exhausted. It is unfortunate she does not listen, but it is in her nature. Perhaps, I send for someone she would listen to, someone she holds his council more deeplyâ€| but that is neither here nor there.

I have lived a long life, and seen many things. The Usurper himself is nothing more than the lasted in a long line of Kin who wished to oppose my Rule; just as it should be. It is the Birthright of all Kin to dominate each other, promoting only the strongest survive and that the weak either serve or die. And just as it was their Right to oppose me, it is within my Rights to defend myself from them. The same can applied to Dead Wings's children. They were disagreed with my policies and goals, then, I might as well give them the right to pursue them so long as they did not threaten me; naÃ-ve as they were.

I had many other Guests such as yourself, each curious about it, all wondering what my plans are intentions are. An elderly Kin, old and with a single eye, but with a gaze that reached all four corners of the Globe, once asked me to slay a giant wolf. Another was a Herd warrior born seeming boundless strength on a quest to perform twelve Tasks; he decided to add me to that collection. Perhaps you know who I am thinking ofâ€|

****Regardless my, Guest, I hope you are on my side, most especially now that the day of my release is coming. As you might have learned by now, though I possess great power and a limited degree of awareness within my Domain, I am a prisoner, kept here against my own will. I am but a shadow of my former self, the wards imprisoning me having drained much of my strength over the centuries I have been held captive. Were it not for Kin aiding me in what was I can, providing me offerings, I might have withered away to nothing. None, save those as long lived as I, remember those days. Those days when Kin never needed to worry about starvation, where they did not have to fear being held in bondage and led the slaughter.****

****It is a light of hope to see that even in our Kind's twilight hours, such loyalty and cooperation still exists. Our Kind used to be so great, did it not? Once, our wisdom and mastery of the world was unquestioned, now I find we are all reduced to such a barbaric state. Now, we are all but pale reflections of what we once were. Our power and prosperity has declined over the millennia, weakened by the slaughter the stampeding Herd. I suppose, they could never stop the slaughter once they started... ****

****But soon, I will be able to correct that. My strength has slowly built up, growing more vibrant, more powerful with each passing day. With the right portents and the correct astrological phenomena, I would be able to shatter my wards and earn what is rightfully mine. I will rebuild my Kingdom and return my Kin to our rightful place; we should not have to submit those murdering beasts!****

****I am sorry, my Guest; I must bid you farewell. Perhaps you shall see me on my day of Glory.****

*** * ***

><p>I bet none of you were expecting that. I mean really, who would write from the Red Death's perspective in such a manner? Breaking the 4th wall, addressing the readers, and then trying to be slightly sympathetic and more complicated than the creature we've seen in many other fics. You probably all thought that my endnotes were super long as usual and fell for my deception.

****There's also a ton of other stuff. Such as the fact that everyone I've already used POV's from before except Alvin and Val got a small scene from their POVs. Boy, that was hard to write.****

****Either way, this is the last chapter for Part One of this story. I am going to take a short break from writing for a while, I need to get myself into reading other things again, as well as adjusting my time tables so I can write more efficiently instead of at 2 AM because of bad timing. I also have to go back and edit the earlier chapters, mostly fixing errors, but also adding details I feel might be important later on.****

****Part 2, I think will feature shorter chapters, but on average will come faster. I need to refine my writing style to be more organic, less blocky if that makes any sense.****

****A Special Thanks to CAN07, Aegis Dragon, SmokeyStorm, Fragmented Disillusionment, and most importantly Thorborn for providing me with**

the support to take it this story far with your detailed and understandable feedback. **

If you guys like this and wish to continue reading, I recommend Following or Favoriting my Author account so that you can get the alert for the sequel when it shows up.

****Edit: Changing Allegiance, the Sequel is already up.****

Until next time, End.

25. Bonus

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

This is a little bonus chapter that I have been planning since before I finished the rest of the story.

It should have come earlier, but I just never had the time. Now that I do, I realize this comes a little late.

Additionally, this allows me to remind veiwers who don't already know that I have gotten work up on the continuation. I'm at a bit of a low point right now, but that's mostly because of the previous arc being such a rollercoaster.

Enjoy and see you in Changing Allegience

I gazed at the two precious object before me, knowing with absolute clarity that the future was uncertain.

The first was a parting memento from an old lover, a red tear shaped gem that once carried the promise of eternal love. It never happened between the two of us, but the jewel was one of the few small comforts I had left. With hunger and fear plaguing me to no end, I needed something to hang onto, even the belief that I could one day I could meet someone I knew. The gem was the only item I had of a life that I had lost.

The second held the promise of a new life, a blue glowing and blackened globe that was warm to the touch. The egg was an unfortunate surprise, compounding the my situation even worse than it already was. Now because of my lack of foresight, I have condemned an innocent child, my child, to spend an frigid eternity with me.

I poked my head out of my small makeshift shelter, a large rowboat that I turned over to provide a small amount of shelter. Outside, I could see nothing other than an empty expanse of white, devoid of anything worth mentioning.

I sighed. It was a small mercy that the snow had stopped falling, but I needed it. I overturned my shelter and cupped my paws together to hold my gem and my egg with ease. The cold wasn't a concern for me, since my body was lined in dark scales resisted the heat and cold better than a tailored bearskin and my insides burned with constant fire, but I had no guarantee my egg could endure the harshness of winter.

With my possessions in hand, I began the start of a long trek that hopefully paid off in either better lodgings or a warm belly.

Or at least, I was about to.

Right as I was about to take the first step, the carcass of a deer landed right in front of my feet. I felt like bending over and taking quick mouthfuls of the slain animal, cooking be damned, but my annoyance and pride wouldn't let me do it—especially since I knew my benefactor was right behind me, waiting for me to take notice he was behind me.

I turned my head around right into the grinning, reptilian snout of a dragon. "You know, I've had suitors who went to shorter lengths to get my attention; I know for a fact this island doesn't have all that many of them and you just go out of your way to deliver them right at my feet."

The dragon's grin could only grow wider at my reprimand. He might have been larger than me by a fair margin, but he was old, or at least aging and had only a single eye. Unlike me, he didn't have separate arms from his wings, but those limbs were big enough to engulf me. He laughed as he saw me. "If I was a decade younger, you'd have been the one throwing yourself all over me!"

I rolled my eyes. My only admirer was an old Monstrous Nightmare who reminded me of someone I knew, my brother in law that rambunctious flirt. While I'll admit I appreciated his support these past weeks, I was growing weary of him being my only contact. I shook my head in disapproval. "Why do you keep following me? Don't you have something better to do!?"

The dragon laughed. "And what would be better than helping a noble Night Fury mother tend to her egg? Such an occasion is by definition a rarity!"

I glowered at the dragon, not really pleased with his words. I mean, sure, I was a dragon, a Night Fury as he said, but I didn't exactly like it—mostly because that's not what I really was. A few days ago, I was a Viking woman, searching for a great treasure. "I'm not really all that noble—whatever you are."

The dragon then smiled and lowered his head. "Flight Commander, One Eye, at your service young lady. It is the purview of the King's Knights to protect the all Kindred."

That was news to me. Dragons had their own rulers, maybe their own society. It was certainly a step above "But-but you hardly know me? Why should I trust you?"

The dragon's smile continued to disturb me, but his words hit me like a sledgehammer. "Because, I know that you were never hatched from an egg—"

My tail and wings perked up like a jolt. He knew I was originally human, but how?

His grin stayed completely the same, but it went from mildly disturbing to something from out of a campfire story. "Oh, I can see things that most Kin are not privy to know, such is the blessing I

earned, though in your case, I knew where you hail from the moment I saw you."

"Wait, what are you saying?"

The Nightmare laughed some more. "I will tell you of everything another time, but there are more important things for us to deal with first..." He looked at my egg with a look of amusement, like it was in many ways his own child. "I am thinking you'd like a safe place to raise your young, a safe place with plenty of food you and your child."

I nodded, my stomach grumbling. I didn't exactly have plenty of options and starving to death was not the sort of thing I planned on telling Odin the moment I stepped in his hall. If nothing else, maybe I can get a place to rest, someplace to sort the madness my life has become. Maybe, and this was a big, hopeful maybe, a place to get help.

"Then eat, this carcass is for you! You'll need your strength if you want to fly all the way." The dragon bit into the deer's flesh and dragged it over to me as if to remphasize the point.

"I-I'm not sure about flying, especially since I can't hang on to my belongings, especially not my egg in the air." I knew a little of flying other than holding my wings up in the air. At best, I could glide down from a tall mountain, but I doubted that alone could let me cross several seas over to where this dragon's king resided.

One Eye shook his head in disapproval. "Truly, this makes things more complicated than I thought..."

"I am notâ€| one of your Kin," I replied. Dragons apparently lacked a word for 'dragon', so I made due with the terms the Nightmare used.

He shook his head in refusal. "You are, from before now and forever then, one of my Kin and I am here to help you."

I rolled my eyes. I failed to see how flowery language was not going to get my belly filled. "I don't think we have the time for you to teach me important life skills." All the same, I bit into the raw flesh of the deer. I was too hungry to complain about where I got my food for long.

"We have plenty of time, a month before the egg hatches, plenty of time to teach even a novice flight skills!"

I turned back to my egg in between bites. Not too long ago when I was human, I had only realized I was pregnant at the last moment. The moment I became a dragon, I bore an egg, likely converting my unborn child into a dragon long before he or she was even born. "... I still dare not go with you, not unless I could ensure my egg's safety."

It was now the Nightmare's turn to give me looks of annoyance. "I suppose it might be more practical if I just let you ride on my back thenâ€| strange way how some wishes come true, I suppose?"

I gagged on a chunk of deer meat for a split second. The thought of being a dragon riding another dragon was justâ€| oddly humiliating on

several levels. What made the whole thing harder to swallow was the fact he almost sounded like he _wanted _to let me ride him. "Wait, what are you talking about?"

The Nightmare's laughter returned full force. "You seem oddly surprised. No matter, I will take you to our King, even if I have to carry you myself if it pleases you..."

"Butâ€¦| what was that other part about?"

"Nothing just internal musings. I have been waiting for quite a while to give a young Night Fury a ride on my back, though, I'll admit, this situation wasn't the one I had in mind; I would have preferred if you were a still either a hatchling, the proper age for it. Just eat up for now, but don't make yourself too full."

"Rightâ€¦|" I went back to swallowing chunks of deer meat. At the very least, the Nightmare definitely seemed large enough to carry me without too much difficulty. He was huge, the biggest of his kind I had ever seen. I was willing to put up with riding a dragon, especially since once or twice I fantasized about that possibility as a child. Riding a dragon while being a dragon was just a whole different level of weirdâ€¦|

Just as promised, One Eye the Nightmare carried me on his back across the sea. After eating my fill and resting off my meal, One Eye allowed me to mount him.

It was definitely as weird as I thought it was, since I was somewhere around a quarter of his size. Still, I had to admit, for someone so old looking, he was stronger than he looked. We flew for what felt like hours, nothing really important happening other than minor shifts in the wind. The whole thing felt a little exhilarating for maybe the first few minutes or so when I feared that I could drop my egg or my jewel if I lost my grip for even a second, but after a while, the whole thing just seemed a little too boring. There was nothing for me to do other than watch the cloud roll by, not even move.

Hours later, right after the skies had been darkened, I was surprised to find out we were flying into Helheim's Gate. The place had frozen over, but it was recognizable by the fog and spires of stone that guarded the way. My husband tried to brave those waters dozens of times and right now, I was practically bypassing their challenge without even needing to lift a finger, er, claw. I was amazed we'd come so far in such a short amount of time, it seemed so unreal to be so close to home...

"We're almost there!" declared One Eye. "The King will wish to speak with you immediately!" Right in front of us was what appeared to be a volcano and One Eye's flying appeared to be taking us towards the top.

One Eye took us through the hole at the top of the mountain and took a steep dive. I was lucky I didn't let go of any of my things, though I was definately feeling like I could slip off the larger dragon at any moment. While I feared for my life and the unborn life of my child, I can't say a part of me felt like it wanted more of that thrill.

Thankfully, it was over just as quickly as it begun. One Eye landed us somewhere near the bottom, just above this bank of red fog.

I quickly dismounted from the Nightmare sick to my stomach, like I was about to cough up the deer meat I had several hours before. I put my egg and jewel on the ground next to me, trying to realign myself with the seemingly spinning world.

While that happened, I caught glimpses of the seemingly hundreds, maybe thousands of dragons that lived the volcano. Each almost seemed like little stars from where I stood. It was at this moment, I realized I was in the dragon nest, the place Vikings had been trying to find for generations. It was surreal to be in a place where no Viking has ever set foot on since everâ€¦ not even now, there was a Viking here. In a short span of time, I had realized that as far as any of them knew, I was one of them.

"**Welcome home," **thundered a voice from behind me. I felt my bones rattle at the voice's words. Whatever it was, it was bigâ€¦ and very intimidating.

I'm not normally a scared woman, but even I knew when it was right to be scared of something. Being a Night Fury who has little to no knowledge of how to defend herself while facing a dragon whose head alone looked like it could crush ships was one of those situations. My jaw dropped at the sight of the massive dragon, his eyes practically big enough to have their reflections to actual size. I might have only been able to see its head from the red fog clouds, but I didn't want to see anything else. "This isn't my homeâ€¦" I squeaked.

I heard a low rumble like a minor earthquake just happened. Then massive dragon's six eye were all closed in at me and I felt like melting right on the spot. "**It is your home; you, as well as your child are always welcome in my domainâ€¦" **

I hastily picked up my egg, and held it against my chest. I hoped he wasn't going to do anything to my unborn child since he seemed interested in it.

One Eye approached me and bowed to the massive dragon. "My King, to forgive her, I had not informed her much about."

The King seemed perpetually amused by my inability to figure out what to do. He kept laughing low. "**Worry not my honored Flight Commander, you were wise to bring her here, where she can be safe." **

"I-I just want to go home." I didn't want to be a dragon. Sure, I always believed they were more than wild animals, but I was just too tired and weary of having to fend for my life against the harsh elements. I really wanted to go home and forget this business even happened.

The King sighed as if disappointed, but not so much he was willing to write me off and crush me. "**I am sorry to hear that you feel you are unwelcome, but I suppose I should assist you in that." **

"You will?... But-"

Before I could tell the massive dragon about my odd circumstances, the King spoke, **"I already know of your origins, child. I know of what steps are necessary for you to return home, but it cannot happen immediately."**

"How long it will take"

"Potentially years in the worst case scenario, but I can guarantee you that you will return to your homeland."

My heart leapt for joy. This was better than I had ever imagined from getting here. Sure, I knew it could potentially take years, but it was better than never going home. "Thank you, sir. I'm glad for your help."

The King's smile could have sawed through the mountain's walls. **"In exchange, though, I will require service from you, for as long you are among Kin. My heart immediately sank. The thought that my only way out of this, might involve having to kill my former people was all too real in my mind. It seemed like the King noticed this and immediately added. "All I will require from you is a small tribute in fish, nothing major or requiring more commitments, though you can opt for such later if you feel like it."**

I gave a sigh of relief. I didn't have to go become an enemy of the Tribe after all. "Thank you, I'll do my best." I bowed to the great dragon.

"Then, in light of recent events and One Eye's recommendation, I shall name you Dead Wings." I blinked this came out of nowhere.

I turned to One Eye who then said: "You couldn't fly for a Night Fury your age that's quite an accomplishment..."

I glowered at the two men as they looked at me suppressed chuckles. They might have been dragons and one of them probably had something to do with the gods, but whatever they were they were still "men". "Hey, my name is" I pause. I tried to say my name, but nothing came out other than a random mess of syllables.

The King shook his massive head, suppressing amused laughter. **"Dead Wings, I do this for your sake. Your old name has no equivalent in our tongue. I merely provide for you a replacement to use while amongst us. Lesser Kin, those who have yet to distinguish themselves do not receive names, make no mistake, though I jest about the name I bestow upon you, you are truly special amongst us. Many never receive one."**

I looked at my egg, wondering how that all worked since my unborn child has yet to receive one. "But then what about-"

"I recommend your child be raised without one. He will be among us for a long time and naming him would only isolate him" advised the King.

I nodded. I didn't really understand the King's reasoning, but it was only because of him I was even receiving a chance to get out of this mess. I might as well honor his request, even if it was something so simple as not giving my second child a name. "Thanks for the advice"

"**Good; now, I do not think I need to advise resting. Rest well, Dead Wings." **And with that, the King disappeared under the red clouds, leaving me to wonder about my future now.

I was Valhallarama, sometimes Valka, wife of Chief Stoick the Vast of the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans. I was an expert adventurer and a certified master of fighting. I have a son called Hiccup who was still in diapers last I saw him. And recently, I had become Dead Wings, the flightless Night Fury who is overly obsessed with her egg.

I shook my head. Whatever let me see my family again, I think I was willing to do it. I wish the King offered me a return home that was less time consuming, but after recent weeks, I was willing to forgo my usual standards. Besides, I needed all the help I could get.

Stoick, Hiccup, I am coming home and nothing is going to stop me.

End
file.